

THE
LORD's-DAY
Evening ENTERTAINMENT,

Containing Fifty-two

Practical Discourses

On the most serious and important

SUBJECTS in DIVINITY,

Intended for the

USE of FAMILIES.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

By JOHN MASON, A. M.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

*Printed for J. BUCKLAND, in Pater-noster Row; and
J. WAUGH, at the Turks-Head in Lombard-Street,
MDCCLII.*

THE
LORDS OF THE
TREASURY

Practical Dispositions

SUBJECTS IN DISCUSSION



A. JOHN MASON, A.M.

VOL. I

LONDON

Printed by J. Baskin, at the 'Lancet' Press, 11, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.



THE PREFACE.

THE Reader may possibly expect that I should in the first place give him my reasons for publishing so many Discourses of this kind at a time when the World already abounds with so many better. But as this appears to me a matter of mere Curiosity, I hope for his Indulgence if I do not gratify it so far as he could wish. They who think there needs no Apology will expect none; and to them who judge that some is necessary, perhaps, none will appear sufficient.

Whilst Providence continues to us Life, Leisure and Capacity, we ought to improve them in that way wherein we have a prospect of being most useful. It was this Consideration, concurring with the Desire of several of my Friends, that first turned my

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Thoughts to this Species of writing. Though it is generally esteemed of all others the most unpopular.

Amidst the great Multiplicity of Sermons which have been so plentifully offered to publick View, I have often thought there has been one thing still wanting, viz. " a complete Set of " practical and devotional Discourses, for the " use of Families, recommending and urging " the great substantial Points of Christianity in " a plain and striking manner, and free from " all distinguishing Peculiarities both in Style " and Sentiment;" and that if such a Design were well executed, it might be of essential service to the cause of real Religion. Some things of this kind, to be sure we have; but I think not enough, considering their useful tendency and how much Variety contributes to the Reader's Advantage as well as Entertainment. This therefore is what I have long had in view, and now venture to offer to the Publick.

Had I, in consequence of that Indulgence which is sometimes due to common Prejudice, thrown these Discourses into another form, and called them Essays, Meditations, or Dissertations, &c. I should thereby in some degree have

THE PREFACE.

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have precluded the Objection that might arise from the Multiplicity of Sermons already published. But this would have required much time, and after all would have answered no other end than making them somewhat more suitable to the taste of those who consider not so much the Entertainment itself as the manner in which it is served up. I thought it best therefore to let them appear in the form in which they were first composed; especially as this would be agreeable enough to many, and is sufficiently adapted to the original Design of the Lord's-Day Evening Entertainment.

I am too sensible of the various Tastes and Tempers of Mankind, and the different lights in which they view the same mental Objects, to imagine that any method of writing on religious Subjects, though ever so plain, serious, and convictive, will satisfy all; or be so happy as to pass uncensured in an Age wherein a Zeal for essential Religion so much evaporates into a Party-Spirit; though perhaps not more than it has done in any preceding Period of time: for this hath always been the great blemish and weakness of the Christian Interest from the very first ages of the Church, those of Persecution only excepted. There are only two things

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things that can unite us; the fear of a common Evil which drives us to the same Refuge, or a zeal for a common Good which excites us to the same Pursuits. The former hath often brought us together; O that the latter had more generally the same effect! — To this end I have thrown in my Mite; and if by the Blessing of God these plain Discourses may in some degree subserve the Interest of vital Piety, and recall the Attentions of Men to the Importance of some of the most plain and essential Principles and Obligations of Christianity, to the honour of God and our common REDEEMER, the great Design of them will be answered; and the Author will have abundant cause to be thankful: to which end he heartily desires the pious Reader to join with him in recommending them again to the divine Blessing.

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S E R M O N I.

The VANITY of HUMAN LIFE and NATURE.



PSALM xxxix. 5.

*Behold thou hast made my Days as
an Hand-breadth, and mine Age is
as nothing before thee: verily,
every man at his best State is al-
together Vanity. Selah.*



O words can give us a more
lively Representation of the Va-
nity of human life and nature
than these I have now read:
Nor is there any Subject in which
we are all more nearly concerned, as mor-
tal Creatures conversant in a vain World, out
of which we must very soon depart.

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The

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I.



The Words have an immediate Connexion with the preceding Verse, where the *Psalmist* puts up this Petition—*Lord make me to know mine End, and the measure of my Days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am.* Two Things *David* here prays that he might always have a just Apprehension of, viz. the *measure of his Days*, and the *frailty of his Frame*; both which he speaks of in the Text in the most diminishing terms. As to the *measure of his Days*, it was but a *Hand-breadth, as nothing*: And as to the *frailty of his Frame*, and of human nature in general, it is thus emphatically described in the following words; *verily every man, at his best State is altogether Vanity.*

What I propose from the Words is,

I. To consider the force and emphasis of them.

II. To enquire into the reason, why the common Sentiments of Mankind concerning human Life, are so very different from these of the *Psalmist*.

III. To vindicate the Propriety of this Description of it.

Lastly,

human Life and Nature.

Lastly, To make a practical Improvement
of the Subject.

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SERM.

I.

I. I am to consider the force and emphasis of the words.

1st. The *Psalmist* gives us here a very emphatical Description of the *measure of his Days*. For

1. He tells us it is but a *Hand-breadth*.
Behold thou hast made my Days as a Hand-breadth.

A *Hand-breadth*, or the Breadth of four fingers was one of the least geometrical Measures among the *Jews*; which we may fitly call an *Inch or two of Time*. But alas! the Thread of Life is as slender as it is short; and often breaks before this Inch or two is run off.

And thus, saith the *Psalmist*, *thou hast made it. Thou hast made my Days as an Hand-breadth*: 'Tis by God's Appointment that it is so; and that for good and wise Purposes. For

Short as the Date of human Life is, it is long enough for *good Men* to spend upon Earth; considered as a State of Sorrow, Temptation, and Danger, it is not too short.

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There

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There is no good man, who hath solid hope of a better Life, but thinks this short time is long enough; full long enough to be exercised with Trials, Afflictions and Fears, and detained from perfect Rest. Again,

Short as human Life is, it is long enough for the *wicked*. For were they to live longer they would but the more enhance their Guilt, and inflame their future Reckoning; do greater Mischief in the World, and give a more extensive Spread to the Contagion of their bad Examples. So that the long lives of the wicked may sometimes be considered as a Judgment, both on themselves and others; and their speedy and untimely Death as a Mercy to both. The sooner such men are swept off from the face of the Earth, and the quicker their Generations succeed, the less probability there is of *abounding Iniquity*.

And the universal Wickedness of the antediluvian World, was in a good measure owing to the Longevity, or long Lives, of that corrupt and abandoned Race of Men. And lastly,

Short as the ordinary period of human life is, it is long enough for all the valuable Purposes

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Purposes of it. Long enough, if well improved, to answer all the ends of a probationary State, and to fit us for a better. Not long enough, indeed, to amass those Heaps of worldly Treasure, that are necessary to satisfy all the Avarice and Ambition of the human heart, (for which an ante-diluvian Age of Success would not suffice) but it is long enough to convince us of the Insufficiency of such Things, and to secure a portion in more durable and substantial Enjoyments.

So that it is for good and wise Ends that God hath been pleased to cut short the Life of Man, and make his *Days as a Hand-breadth*. But,

2. The *Psalmist* speaks of it in yet more diminishing terms when he adds, *my Age is as nothing before thee*.

A Hand-breadth was too great a measure for it. It may rather be considered as a mere Point, that hath no measure or dimension: or as a Vapour that appears and disappears at the same Instant. (a)

"But is not this a very exorbitant Diminution? Fifty, sixty, or seventy Years of Life, surely, must be something. In com-

B 3

mon

(a) Jam. iv. 14.

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I.



“mon Estimation and the ordinary account
“ it is reckoned a long Period.” It is so, and
it certainly is of account when compared
with *time*; but when compared with *Eter-*
nity it is of none at all. It dwindles into a
point, and vanishes into nothing. And in
this View the *Psalmist* calls it so. *My Age*
is as Nothing before THEE: Before THEE
who inhabitest Eternity. But,

II. The *Psalmist* gives us a much more di-
minishing description of the *Frailty of our*
nature than he does of the *measure of our*
Days. For, *verily every Man at his best State*
is altogether Vanity.

Every Word is emphatical. I shall there-
fore briefly open to you the force of the Sen-
timent by Way of Gradation; beginning at
the lowest Step first, that you may distinctly
see how it rises to the highest.

1. Then Man is a *vain* creature.

This is the first thing contained in the
words; the lowest Step of the Gradation.
Man is vain. By *vain*, we mean either that
which is *frail and feeble*, or that which is
empty and unprofitable. In both these senses
man is a vain Creature; and that in every
view.

human Life and Nature.

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view. He is so in himself, and so are SERM.
his Pursuits, his Enjoyments, and his Life. I.

1. He is so *in Himself*. Both in Body and Mind. ~

His Body is but a living Lump of Earth, making haste to deformity and dust. He comes into the World in the most weak and defenceless Condition of any Creature on Earth. The little Interval between his Birth and his Death is filled up with a variety of Vanities; and then his mortal part descends to the Dust, and becomes the Repast of Worms.

But if you consider him in his better part, still he is vain. How feeble, contracted, and low, are the very best Powers of his mind! How weak his Reason! How cramped his Understanding! How little does he own he knows! And how very little does he truly know of what he thinks he does! He is *but of Yesterday and knows nothing*. And yet *this vain man would be wise*. (b)

2 His Pursuits and Desires are vain.

He hath a low, trifling turn of Mind. An Infant, with all it's childish Toys about it, thinks itself happy. Nor can you persuade

(b) Job xi. 12.

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persuade it to believe there is any thing better than the Gratification of those little Fancies and low Appetites by which it is governed. "This we say is the Vanity of that Age." Well, but does Man when he grows up get rid of this Vanity? No; he only moves out of a lower into a higher Circle of it. He has his Toys and his Bawbles still: more suited indeed to his Age and Rank, but as mere Vanities as those which amused his infant Years. And were the mind of man but to make as quick Improvements in true wisdom, as the minds of Youth do in common Knowledge, he would soon look upon the ordinary Pursuits and Pleasures of Manhood to be altogether as vain and fruitless as those of Childhood, and would be very ready to fall in with the *Psalmist's* Sentiment, *Surely every Man walketh in a vain Shew, surely they are disquieted in vain.*

3. His *Enjoyments* are vain.

That is, the very Objects of his Pursuit are vain and unsatisfying things if he could attain them, which further shews the Vanity of such Pursuits. And these are commonly the Profits, the Pleasures, and the Preferments

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I.

ments of the World. But Vanity is inscribed upon them all.

Riches make to themselves Wings, and flee away, (c). And are sometimes kept for the Owners thereof to their Hurt, (d).

Earthly Pleasures are always dashed with some distasteful Ingredient; are never pure and unmixed; sooner surfeit than satisfy; and often leave a Sting behind them. None but a man void of Wisdom will intoxicate himself with a Cup of palatable Poison.

But of all Things how vain is Honour? The Honour that cometh from Man only, and hath no Foundation in Merit? Without which the Man that hath it cannot abide in it, but is like the Beasts that perish, (e). That must be a very light and vain mind indeed, that is puffed up with a little popular Breath, exalted with a Blast of Air; when perhaps the very wind that mounts it, bursts it, and proves the painted Bubble to be but Shew and Emptiness.

Lastly, His Life is vain.

That is, not only filled up with Vanity, but transient, short, and uncertain. And therefore it is compared to the frailest and vaineſt

(c) Prov. xxiii. 5.

(d) Eccl. v. 13.

(e) Pſal. xlix. 12.

The Vanity of

SERM. vaineſt Things in Nature, (f). David
 I. ſaith, that *Man is like to Vanity, becauſe his
 Days are as a Shadow that paſſeth away,*
 (g). But this hath been conſidered already.

Well, this then is the firſt Thing contain-
 ed in the *Pſalmiſt's* Deſcription of human-
 kind, and the loweſt Step of the Gradation,
 that man is *vain*. He is ſo in *himſelf*, in
 his *Pursuits*, in his *Enjoyments*, and in his
Life. But,

2. The *Pſalmiſt* ſaith, that Man is not
 only vain, but *Vanity* itſelf.

And the truth of this in part appears
 from what hath been already ſaid; whether
 by *vain* we mean that which is *frail* and
feeble, or that which is *empty* and *unprofit-*
able.

If by vain we mean that which is *frail*
 and *feeble*, man is *Vanity*. His Strength
 ſoon conſumeth to Aſhes, and *he is cruſhed*
before the Moth (b). Where are the many
 Myriads of thoſe vain Creatures, who once
 made a little figure in ſome corner of the
 World or other, as we do now? Not one in
 a mil-

(f) Somnus, Bulla, Vitrum, Glacies, Flos, Fabula, Fœnum,
 Umbra, Cinis, Punctum, Vox, Sonus, Aura, Nihil.

(g) Pſal. cxliv. 4.

(b) Job iv. 9.

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I.

a million of them have so much as their very names recorded to Posterity. And as to those few, whose names have escaped the general Oblivion, the greatest part of them are famous for little else than their being more deeply tinctured with the common vanity than other men.

Or if by *vain* we mean that which is *empty* and *unprofitable*, surely man is *Vanity*. Other Creatures are useful in their Rank, obey the Law of their nature, and answer the various ends of their Being; whilst man in general perverts the Design of his, runs counter to the Law of his Creation, and is a Kind of Cumber-ground in the works of Nature. Other things were made for man, and according to their respective nature, serve him, as they were designed; whilst man, who was made for God, forgets (the great Design of his Being) to serve his Maker, on whom he depends for the continuance of that Being. Is not such a Creature Vanity? But,

3. Man is not only Vanity, but *altogether Vanity*.

As if the *Psalmist* had said, "Take him
"altogether, Body, Soul and Spirit, consider
"his Life and Conversation, his Wants and
Weak-

SERM.

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“Weaknesses, his Beginning and End, his
 “Ambition and Aims, his Schemes and La-
 “bours, his Joys and Sorrows, his restless
 “Rage, his anxious Cares, and fruitless
 “Fears; and how very vain a Creature is
 “he! In short, take him altogether, and he
 “is *altogether Vanity*.”

This is a very humbling Thought. And do not let us now secretly flatter ourselves with an Exemption from the common vanity of our Race. If we do, we thereby evidently prove upon ourselves the very Charge we would disown. For,

4. This is the Condition not only of some of our Race, but of the whole of it; and of every Individual in it. **EVERY MAN is *altogether Vanity*.**

Vanity is inseparable from Mortality; and adheres to every man, in every state and condition of Life. *Surely men of low Degree are Vanity, and men of high Degree are a Lye: To be laid in the Balance, they are altogether lighter than Vanity, (i).* And that we may be still more assured of this, it is added,

5. That

(i) Psal. lxii. 9.

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5. That every Man AT HIS BEST STATE SERM.
is altogether Vanity. I.

In the Original it is when he is settled or established, (k). When he thinks his Mountain stands strong, and imagines with himself, that he shall never be moved: When he abounds in Health and Wealth, with Friends and Flatterers, enjoys the most extensive and established Interest, loaded with Honour, Pleasure and Power; put the Crown of Solomon upon his Head, and all his Knowledge into it; and what is he after all, but a poor, vain Creature? Nay, altogether Vanity!

Lastly, That we may not look upon this to be all poetical Flourish, or a mere rhetorical Strain of Speech, it is affirmed in the most solemn manner, as a most real and solid Truth; and therefore the Psalmist fixes the particle of *Asseveration* before it, and that of *Attention* after it: VERILY, every Man at his best State is altogether Vanity. SELAH.

Thus have I endeavoured to open to you the force and beauty of this strong Description, which the Psalmist here gives us of the Vanity of human Life and Nature; in
which

SERM.

I.



which every word is weighty and emphatical, and comes with a redoubled Stab to the Pride of the human Heart. I proceed now,

II. To enquire into the reason, why our common Sentiments of human Life are so very different from these of the *Psalmist*.

Now upon a little Recollection we shall find, that there are two things that will very naturally account for this. And they are *Inconsideration* and prevailing *Sensuality*.

I. One reason why men do not more generally think in this manner is, because they do not *consider*.

They do not steadily attend to the nature, consequence, and final issue of things; but confine their views to present Objects and Appearances, which are sure to deceive them.

Were a man always to continue in his best State, in Health, Wealth, Wisdom and Honour, he would not then be so altogether *Vanity*. But, alas! this is impossible. *The Fashion of the World passeth away*, (1). The present Scene will soon shift; every thing here

(1) 1 Cor. vii. 31.

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here is in a state of fluctuation, and will ere long put on quite another face; and as Appearances vary, the Sentiments of Mankind vary with them.

Now a wise man knows this, and considers it; guards his mind against the deception of false and flattering Appearances; does not terminate his views on the outside of things, but looks into them, and considers their real worth: Does not confine his Eye to the present Enjoyment, but looks beyond it to it's distant consequences, and considers how it will appear when past: And by this he forms his Judgment, and directs his Choice. Did we but thus impartially weigh Things in the Balance of Wisdom, we should soon find, that many of those things that are most highly esteemed among men, are *altogether lighter than Vanity, (m).*

2. Another Thing which renders men unwilling to give into this Sentiment, is the prevalence of a *sensual taste* and *appetite*.

Sense and Appetite too often corrupt the Judgment. It is a hard thing for men to believe what they would not have to be true. The truth is, their Affections are engaged; and

(m) Psal. lxii. 9.

SERM. and they cannot help thinking well of what

I.



they love: They do not care to hear those things disparaged or despised, which they exceedingly value: Nor can they be easily persuaded to think, that what they have fondly set their Hearts upon is so *altogether vain*. They have suffered their Appetite to go before their Judgment, and their Fancy to take the Lead of Reason; have placed an undue Value upon things before they have examined them; and then, instead of loving them because they are valuable, they value them because they love them; and prize them not according to their real Worth, but according to the Affection they have blindly set upon them. Which is the true reason that children are so fond of Toys and Trifles; and that men (like them) are so warmly enamoured with what they cannot, in their cooler Judgment, esteem as intrinsically excellent. The constant Effect of suffering the Fancy to go before the Understanding.

This, it must be owned, is a very preposterous Method of proceeding. For to determine by Fancy, is like *judging* with the *Will*, and is setting Imagination in the Room of Reason. But, preposterous as it is, nothing

is

is more common. And it fully accounts for this strange Conduct of mankind, in making those things the chief Objects of their desire and pursuit, which when they come to reflect soberly, and think wisely, they readily pronounce *Vexation* and *Vanity*.

III. The next general head I proposed was, to vindicate the propriety of this extraordinary Description which the *Psalmist* here gives us of human Life and Nature.

And we shall soon be convinced of the justness of this description, if we but duly consider these two things,

1. What man is in comparison of what he shall be.

2. How he acts in comparison of what he should do.

1. If we consider what man is in comparison of what he shall be.

He lives in a corrupt, changeable, and dying world. And it would be strange indeed if a state of frailty, mutability, and mortality, were not a state of *Vanity*. Were we but seriously to think of *Eternity* (which creatures who live upon the borders of it, one would think, frequently should) we should

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I.



soon be convinced, that the *Psalmist's* representation of our present mortal life is not too much exaggerated, when he compares it to a *Hand-breadth*, and a mere *nothing*. Do we not look upon one single moment of time as a mere Point, when compared with the many years we have already lived? But one single Moment of time bears an infinitely greater proportion to the Period of human life, than the whole Period of human life does to eternity. If *that* in the former comparison be but a point, *this* in the latter comparison is as nothing.

Nay, the whole duration of this habitable world, is but a Point in comparison of Eternity; as the whole mass of it is but an Atom in comparison of the universe. We cannot easily bring ourselves at present, perhaps, to think of the Duration of human life in this diminutive manner, but when we look back upon it some millions of Ages hence, we certainly shall.

The years of our present mortal state indeed considered as preparatory for an eternal one, are of great Importance and Value: especially if they be so improved as to fit us for a happy Eternity. Though they be but

as

as cyphers themselves, yet thus improved they are as cyphers placed on the right hand of the figure, which gives them a vast significance. How concerned then should we be by a course of steady Piety and Virtue to add a value to this nothing, by improving our transient years to the purposes of eternal Bliss! Because *on this moment of time depends Eternity.*

2. We shall be more sensible of the justness of this Description which the *Psalmist* gives us of the Vanity of mankind, if we consider in what manner they generally act in comparison of what they should do.

Let us consider then,

1. In what manner they ought to live as reasonable Creatures in a state of trial and preparation for an Eternal world.

Impressed with this thought, would they not be very careful to watch their heart and behaviour, and daily examine their temper and conduct, by that Rule of righteousness which God hath given them for their direction and guide; lest they should be unawares seduced into sin, to the danger and detriment of their immortal interest?

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Would they not be very diligent to inform themselves of the true way to eternal life; and be greatly concerned to be directed right in a matter of so vast Importance, in which many are so fatally mistaken?

Would they not very carefully improve all their time, especially all their sacred time, to cultivate the Principles of piety and Habits of virtue, and establish the most solid Hopes of future Blessedness; *lest having a promise thereof left them, they should seem to come short of it, (n)?*

Would they not with much indifference, or rather contempt, look down upon those vain amusements and false pleasures of this life, which are so apt to draw off their thoughts from the concerns of a better?

Would they not be in great good earnest about the life and power of religion, and to have some undoubted Evidence of their own sincerity?

Would they not be every day thinking of their last; and look upon every new day as a gracious Favour of heaven bestowed upon them, on purpose that they may be the better prepared for their last?

And,

(n) Heb. iv. 1.

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I.

And, in fine, would they not readily comply with that method of Salvation which God in his Word hath revealed to us by his Son?

Thus rational Creatures in a state of preparation for a better world, in all reason ought to live; and thus it is most certain they would live, were they but duly influenced with the thoughts of that Eternal world they live upon the borders of. But now,

2. Do we find that they really do live in this manner? Is not the general course and conduct of their lives often just the reverse of this?

How rarely are they disposed to think of another world! How unattentive to the Government of their lives and passions! How sadly enslaved to the lowest lusts and appetites! How regardless of God! How fearless of sin! How apt to make a jest of it! and to glory in it! How disgusted at serious, vital, heart-renewing Religion! How improvident and profuse of their precious time! of which they make the saddest waste without the least regret! How assiduously devoted to this world! How passionately

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I.



nately enamoured with the profits, pleasures or preferments of it! rather than not obtain which they will spend a whole life in the pursuit of them! and continue to pursue them in the broad way to Hell, and even to the very precipice of eternal Destruction! How formal and spiritless, dull and trifling in religious worship, which to them is rather penance than pleasure! Nay, sometimes they throw off the very appearance of Religion, and live in a contented neglect of all that worship they owe to their Maker; and despise and reject that divine Revelation which he hath sent them by his Son, and the only way of Salvation therein prescribed! And whilst they continue under the power of a temper, and in a course of behaviour, so intirely perverted, how utterly USELESS are they both to themselves and others, as to any of the great and valuable purposes for which life was given them? — And whilst Men continue thus to live and act, may they not justly be said to *walk in a vain Shew?* and, in strict propriety of speech, to be *altogether Vanity?*

So much may suffice to illustrate the Proposition in the Text, and to shew you the

pro-

human Life and Nature.

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propriety of the sentiment therein contained. SERM.
What remains is now, I.

Lastly, To make a practical improvement
of the Subject.

1. *Seeing we know these things, let us beware lest we also be led away with the Error of the wicked.*

This is the salutary caution which the Apostle *Peter* gives us, very applicable to the case before us, (o): That is, that we take care we do not give into the false Notions or mistaken Sentiments of the profane and unthinking part of mankind.

I know that the Language of the world, with regard to the Condition of the great men of it, in general runs in a strain very different from this of the *Psalmist*, and his Son. And whilst we are conversant in a world of Vanity, we must necessarily hear many expressions far distant from strict truth, as well as see many actions not to be reconciled to strict justice; and that too amongst men of no vulgar sense and character. But we are not obliged to learn either the one or the other. If we hear others speak with admiration and envy of the wealthy wicked man,

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purely

(o) 2 Pet. iii. 17.

SERM.

I.

purely on the score of his Earthly grandeur, though his hand and heart be equally shut to every thing that is great and good and generous, we need not fall in with that strain of false applause: Nay, we cannot in conscience do it, if we but believe what the *Psalmist* hath now been telling us.

We are too apt to imbibe the wrong sentiments, and imitate the bad actions of the men we converse with. And we shall never be safe from this till we come to habituate ourselves to look upon things as they are, abstracted from all their false appearances, and take right Reason and plain Scripture for our constant Guide, and only Rule, both in matters of judgment and practice.

2. The Words of the Text, if well considered, must surely be a sovereign Cure for Envy; unless Vanity, Folly, and Wretchedness be the proper Objects of it.

Why should you envy any one for being more deeply immers'd in vanity than other men? If you cannot convince him, do not envy him. Let him alone. Let him please and pride himself a while in those Vanities he will soon outlive the enjoyment of; and if he be not possessed of something more substantial

human Life and Nature.

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stantial he is not so much the object of Envy as Pity. SERM.
I.

Consider his end. Read the xxxvii, xxxix, and lxxiii *Psalms*, and attend to what you read, and it will effectually kill all the Seeds of Envy, when you *behold the prosperity of the wicked*. For how can you envy one whom you know to be *in his best state but altogether Vanity*? Accustom yourself to that thought; and if by the grace of God you have chosen a wiser and a better part, however low be your situation in Life, you have great reason to be content and thankful.

Envy always sets a high esteem upon that which excites it; and indeed is excited by a consciousness that it wants what it so much esteems. Whatever a man envies another for, he would be proud of himself, so that Envy is a most complicated Vice; and not only carries in it the most unsocial and malignant dispositions toward others, but all the seeds of Vanity, Pride, Avarice and Ambition, from whence it springs. And the only way to cure it is, to mortify those Vices by habituating the sentiments in the Text.

Is

SERM.

I.

Is man in his *best state* altogether Vanity; what is he then in his worst state?

When he runs and pants and toils after the world *in vain*! and sacrifices his Health, and Peace, and Fame, and Conscience, for what he can never obtain! when neither Pains, Perplexities, Perils, Adversity, nor Age, can rebate the ardour of his fruitless pursuit! but he grows old in disappointment and slavery! and never wise by thought! when distress and calamity are lost upon him, and never once set him on thinking as he ought! when he pursues the world with as much zeal as if it had never deceived him! incapable of enjoying any Pleasures but the most vile and sordid ones, and even these he cannot obtain! This world is his all, and yet he cannot enjoy it! and is altogether unconcerned about a better! What a dreadful image is here of a rational creature! an immortal creature born for immortal bliss! Surely this is the worst state a man can be in whilst he is in this world. And if that which men imagine to be the best is *altogether Vanity*, this which for certain is the worst, must be *altogether misery and madness*.

4. Let us learn hence to rectify our sentiments of human life and all its vanities.

For

human Life and Nature.

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SERM.

I.

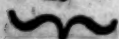
For it is but little else we see in it. *Vanity of Vanities* (saith the preacher) *all is vanity.*

(p) This was his text; and no man was ever able to make a better Comment upon it. This Book of *Ecclesiastes* (which he is supposed to have writ towards the latter end of life) is a Sermon on that subject; which he preached mostly from his own large Experience; and the little that we have, confirms a good deal of what we there read. We stand not upon so high an eminence as he did, and therefore cannot take so large a view of the Vanities of life as he could; but we see enough in our lower situation to convince us, that those things which have the most attractive Charms in life are vanity, and that there is no such thing as eagerly pursuing these Vanities without *Vexation of spirit.*

“But these things, you say, are desirable in their place.” Very true; but then keep them in their place. You see in what place two of the greatest kings and wisest men that ever lived, the father and the son, who were both much better judges of these things than we can be, I say, you see in what place they have ranked them. They who knew them best

SERM.

I.



best, give them not one degree of preheminnence above Vanity.

“ But after all they are subservient, to many of the comforts and conveniences of this “ Life.”——They are so. But then they are subservient to nothing else, and there lies their Vanity. And we may even now be happy without them. However, let us then seek and use them only as such; and keep them in subordination to better things, that subserve our happiness in another world. For if we put them into competition with these, we raise them far above their proper rank and place, and no longer look upon them as Vanity.

And to rectify our sentiments of them let us view them in these three following lights.

1. What do we think of them under a grievous fit of Pain or Sickness? When all of them together cannot purchase for us so much as one moment's Ease. Then they begin to appear like the mere Vanities they really are. Let us then judge of them in health and ease as we have done, and as we shall do again, in a time of sickness and pain. For it is not their nature but our condition that is changed. They are the same

same, and therefore our sentiments of them should be so too.

SERM.

I.

2. What shall we think of them at Death? It is then that men always form the truest thoughts of human life. Then we shall readily give into these sentiments of *David* and *Solomon*, that *all is Vanity*, and *every Man at his best State is altogether Vanity*.

3. Suppose we were to judge of them by the general character of those who possess the most of them; and see the pernicious effects they generally have upon the minds of men; what shall we think of them then?

Take them in any of these views, and they will appear to be what the royal *Psalmist* and preacher have both agreed to call them, viz. *very Vanity*,

Lastly, Are these things really vain; it is time then that we seek out for some more substantial good.

An affluence of these things is but a superfluity of *Vanity*. A moderate competency, (*Agur's* wish) is much more desirable; a happy mean between wealth and want; wherein we enjoy all the advantages without the

SERM.

I.

temptations of the two extremes. If we have this we have great reason to be content and thankful. But what then? If our hope and happiness lie all below, even this the *best State of Life*, will be but Vanity.

O Christians! it is high time indeed to get this World out of our heart, and to keep it under our feet; to live up to our better hopes and the views of that heavenly preferment we are born to; and no longer permit these earthly vanities to captivate and debase our immortal souls, whose vast capacities they can never fill.

The providence of God reads us many a mournful comment on the Text we have been considering. In the frequent disappointments of the world, the perpetual Vicissitude of things, and the unexpected death of our friends, we often *see* the vanity of human life we are so backward to believe. But if the providence of God, if the word of God if our own experience, observation and reason do not effectually convince us of it, there is but one thing that can; and that is our own dissolution. But then conviction comes too late.

What

human Life and Nature.

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I.

What remains then but that we lift our hearts to God and heaven, by a steady fervent faith, and leave this *vain world* to those low and little minds that cannot rise above it. And whilst they have their portion in this life, and are concerned for no better, may our souls be continually aspiring after higher joys, the presence of God, the bliss of heaven, durable riches, substantial honours, and *pleasures for evermore.*



S E R.



S E R M O N II.

The good FRUITS of AFFLICTIONS.

HEB. xii. 11.

*Now no chastening for the present
seemeth to be joyous, but grievous:
nevertheless afterward it yieldeth
the peaceable fruit of Righteous-
ness, unto them which are exercised
thereby.*



WE have no need to affect (as
some seem to do) (a) to mag-
nify the miseries of mortal
Life. If we take but a general
survey of them, on a mode-
rate computation, with all the alleviations of
Mercy

(a) See Young's true Estimate of human life.

Mercy with which they are mixed, we shall see but too much reason to conclude, with *Solomon*, that human Life is *vain*, and with *Job*, that *Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward, (b).*

In such a situation now, what doth Wisdom dictate? What doth right Reason direct? But to arm and fortify ourselves before hand against these unavoidable evils; that we may bear them in the best and easiest manner when they overtake us. And the best way to bear afflictions is, not to neglect or slight them on the one hand, nor to sink under them on the other. Or as it is better expressed in *verse the fifth*, before the text, *not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when we are rebuked of him.*

And that this is the best way of suffering Affliction appears from hence, because it at once renders us more able to bear them, and better disposed to receive benefit from them. And a greater motive or inducement to engage us to bear our Afflictions in this manner, cannot be urged, than that which is suggested to us in the words of the Text; *viz. That they are the chastisements of our*
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(b) Job v. 7.

The good Fruits

heavenly Father's Hand; and though grievous at present, yet are sent to produce the most happy and beneficial effects. *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.*

Without any further comment on the words, I shall proceed to open and improve them for our instruction in the following manner.

I. I shall endeavour to shew you, what are those *Fruits of Righteousness*, which the divine chastenings are sent to produce.

II. Why they are called *peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*.

III. In whom Afflictions produce these good effects.

IV. What is necessary on our part to secure them.

Lastly, I shall make a proper improvement of the subject.

I. I am to shew you, what are those *Fruits of Righteousness* which the divine chastenings are sent to produce.

No chastening, saith the apostle, for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness. The former part of the words is too sensibly verified by our own frequent experience to need any proof. Afflictions are grievous. If they were not so, they would not be afflictions. If we did not feel the chastenings of the divine Hand, they would not answer their end.

However it may not be amiss here to observe—That some are exercised with much more grievous Afflictions, than others. And the same Afflictions are not equally grievous to all. But of whatsoever kind or degree they are, here lies our comfort, that they are all inflicted by our heavenly Father's Hand: Who never punishes his children but for their good, but if need be, and never more than he will give them strength to bear. This we are as firmly and as fully assured of, as we are that he is our Father, a wise, kind and tender Father, and has (as surely he must have) a paternal compassion for all his offspring. It is necessary therefore that Afflictions be grievous, in order to work out the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

SERM.

II.

Fruits of righteousness is a Hebrew form of speech, by which we are to understand *righteous fruits*; or whatever tends to purify and exalt the soul, and render it more righteous and holy in the sight of God. For as sin pollutes and debases the mind, Righteousness refines and dignifies it; which is the frequent effect of its being tried, like metal, in the furnace of Affliction. But to come closer to the point.

Those *fruits of righteousness*, or those righteous fruits, which Afflictions are intended to produce, are such as these.

1. The mortification of our sinful lusts.
2. A more warm and active zeal and diligence in the great duties of life and religion.
3. The improvement of those divine virtues and graces in which we have been too defective.

1. The mortification of our sinful lusts.

And the sins which adversity was chiefly designed to mortify, are those which are most apt to rise out of prosperity. I shall mention but *two*, viz. *Pride* and *Worldly-mindedness*.

1. One

of Afflictions.

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I. One end and design of Affliction is to take away our *Pride*. SERM.
II.

A rank weed which often takes root, springs up, and rises high, under the sunshine of prosperity, (especially where the soil is fat and fertile) and is hardly eradicated by all the cold and chilling blasts of Adversity.

But how does Adversity make a man humble? Why, it sets him on thinking; thinking in good earnest; not in that low, false, formal, and superficial manner he did before, but with concern and intenseness. His thoughts are now just, deep and penetrating. He feels them, and sometimes is almost afraid of them. He thinks in a manner he never did (and wonders he never did) before. He takes a larger view and scope in the meditations of his mind, and begins to examine things seriously from the bottom. He looks backward to things past, and forward to things future; turns his thoughts inward and outward, upward and downward, and all with a solicitous desire to find some solid foundation to rest upon; to know the true state of his case, and where he may have leave to hope. And the result of all this deep thought and self-research is

SERM.

II.



generally this, the language of *Job* in the same case, *Behold I am vile* (c). We then see more arms in our hearts and tempers than we ever saw before: More neglects and defects than we ever thought ourselves guilty of, for want of this self-inspection, and thorough inward scrutiny. We then see nothing to nourish and feed our pride, but many, very many things to excite our shame and self-abasement.

A very happy fruit of Affliction this. For when the soul is once thoroughly humbled, it is then in the most happy disposition to receive the best instruction and the sweetest consolation: Both which the latent pride of our heart rendered us very incapable of receiving before.

2. Another spiritual evil which Afflictions are particularly sent to mortify, is our *Worldly-mindedness*.

A very bad habit which we are too apt to indulge in a state of ease and affluence. When our mountain stands strong, we are ready to imagine, with the *Psalmist*, that we shall never be moved, that we shall never be in adversity: forgetting the mutability of things, and

(c) *Job* xl. 4.

and the vicissitude to which a mortal state is subject. Though instances thereof are every day reaching our eyes or ears, yet, how it is I know not, but, almost every one seems to think, or seems to live, as if he thought himself exempted from this common condition of mortality, and though he sails among rocks and shelves, and is every minute in danger of being wrecked, yet seems as fearless as if he were on shore.

Afflictions therefore are necessary to awaken us to a proper sense of our outward as well as our inward state; to convince us of the vanity of the world, as well as the vileness of the heart; to remove our false confidences, and turn our hopes to more substantial things; and to teach us by experience, what we are so unapt to learn by information, that *every man at his best state is altogether Vanity.* (d).

And the mortification of these lusts of the mind, is the more necessary, as they are connected with many others: *Pride* with *Passion*, *Impatience*, *Discontent*, *Murmuring*, *Self-confidence*, *Slander*, *Revenge* and *Cruelty*; and *Worldly-mindedness* with *Avarice*,

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rice, Deceit, Self-sufficiency, Oppression, Excess and Irreligion : and because the contrary virtues of *Humility* and *Heavenly-mindedness* are of great use for the right improvement of all our Afflictions.

2. Another beneficial fruit of Affliction is a more warm and active zeal and diligence in all the great duties of life and religion.

When a long and severe distemper sinks and weakens all our animal and mental powers, deprives us of every capacity of active usefulness, and throws us wholly upon the friendly care and assistance of others ; I say, under such useless and helpless circumstances, it is natural for us to reflect upon the many talents and opportunities of doing good, which we had long enjoyed but lost ; which we were once favoured with, but of which we are now deprived, and under the sad apprehension, perhaps, that they will never more return. Now we begin to regret our past Negligence and Sloth, and to think how much more good we might have done in the world than we have done ; to consider what account we can give of the talents we have received, if we should now be called to the bar of God ; and to form the most serious

serious and solemn Resolves to redeem our Time, and improve our Advantages (if it shall please God to spare us) to better purpose than we have hitherto done.

And if God is pleased in his great mercy, and in answer to our Prayers, to restore to us our wonted Comforts and Capacities, we cannot readily forget the good purposes we formed. And the remembrance of them, if we have any sensibility left, will excite us to put them in execution; by redoubled diligence and zeal in improving those opportunities and advantages better, of which we have so precarious a possession. Especially when hereto we add this thought (which is a very natural one) that if our misimproved Time and neglected Talents lay with so much weight upon our Conscience in our day of Affliction, how much greater pain and anguish will it give us to think, under a future Affliction, that they have been *again* neglected and misimproved as before, notwithstanding so fair a warning, and so many purposes to improve them better. Therefore to prevent these comfortless and insupportable Reflections hereafter, we shall naturally be excited to greater diligence in

all

SERM.

II.



all the Duties of our station, and to greater zeal and sincerity in our Addresses to God, for his Grace to strengthen and assist us.

But beside this, there is another motive to Zeal and Diligence, with which a good man is actuated in such a case as this, arising from a principle of Gratitude to God for the mercy he hath received. The pious, grateful soul thinks he can never do enough for that God who, in answer to his fervent Prayers, so seasonably interposed for his Deliverance, and restored to him the Blessings he so earnestly desired. And the language of his Heart will be that of the Apostle *Paul*, immediately after his conversion, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do, (c)?*

I can hardly think but that every good man must find himself affected in some such manner as this, upon emerging out of any deep Affliction. And when he is, it is very apparent how much he will be excited hereby to greater care and assiduity in all the important Duties of his character. Which is another very considerable Benefit intended, and often produced, by adverse Providences. But,

3. Ano-

lis

(c) Acts ix. 6.

3. Another good fruit of Affliction is manifest in the visible Growth and Improvement of those particular Virtues and Graces in which we have been too deficient.

It is not unlikely but that Afflictions may sometimes be sent with an immediate View to the Cultivation of some particular Disposition in the mind. However, it is certain that they are always sent for the Christian's spiritual Advantage in general: which end can no otherwise be answered, than by the Improvement of those particular Graces which constitute his christian Character. And these, I apprehend, are principally intended in the Text by *the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*. Some of them therefore I shall particularly specify.

1. One great design of Affliction is to revive our *regards to God*; and to engage us to seek our happiness from, and fix our Dependance only upon him.

It is a sad thing to say it, (but nothing is more common, and nothing a plainer sign of the obliquity of the human heart than this) that the very Gifts and Bounties of our heavenly Father's hand, which were designed to engage us more to himself, are often-



oftentimes the very things which most of all draw off and alienate our Hearts from him. How many, instead of loving him more, seem to love him less for the distinguishing Benefits he bestows on them? Abuse his choicest Favours to his dishonour! and place all their Confidence, (not on him, but) on the very Gifts his Hand bestows, without any regard to the Giver! As if the Hand that gave them, could not as easily take them back. This is a great Evil, and one of the most egregious Follies that ever seized the Heart of man: intirely owing to the intoxicating nature of earthly prosperity, working upon the weakness of the human Heart, and making it vain, thoughtless, and unative to the true nature of things.

The discipline of Adversity now was designed to correct this vanity, and cure this weakness, by shewing us the folly of our false Confidences, and by fixing our Dependance where alone it ought to be placed, viz. on God himself. When our tottering *Reed* is crushed, and fails us, we then seek out for a stronger Support. When our *broken Cisterns* are drained, we repair to the *Fountain*. And why did we not before? The nature

nature of things was the same then as now. True; but our notions of them were different. And here lies the great Benefit of Adversity. It corrects our Errors, gives us a juster notion of things, and teaches us to think better. And what can be a greater Error, what a falser notion, than to suppose the Gift is to be preferred to the Giver? To become indifferent to the greatest Good, and to set our Hearts on that which *may*, nay, that which *will*, nay, that which we *know* will most certainly disappoint our Trust!

2. Another christian Virtue which Afflictions are very proper to cultivate, is *Humility*.

Pride, I have before observed, is often the Fruit of Prosperity; oftener, it is to be feared, than Humility is of Adversity. For when that Vice has once taken deep root in the Heart, the roughest Storms of Trouble can scarce subdue it. However, I say, Afflictions are a very proper means in themselves to promote Humility, and seldom fail to do it, when the Heart is in any degree previously disposed to it. Because they set before us, in a very striking manner,

SERM.

II



ner, the frailty of our nature; and incline us to deep Thought and impartial Self-research. And there needs no more than this, to give us those mortifying Views of our defects which will infallibly humble us.

And this indeed is one of the greatest Benefits we receive from Afflictions. Because when this Virtue hath once taken Possession of the Heart, it immediately drives from thence all those Vices which are found in the train of Pride; and gives it the best Disposition to do and receive the greatest Good. The self-emptied Soul is most capable of being filled with *the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*.

3. *Patience* is another Grace that is often much improved by Afflictions.

For without them it could have no Exercise or Trial. A Christian would have no Opportunity of knowing what Improvement he makes in this Virtue, if he met with no Disappointments and Sufferings to put it to the Proof. And all the christian Virtues are best improved by frequent Exercise, *Tribulation worketh Patience, (f).*

This

(f) Rom. v. 3.

This is a Grace peculiar to a state of Probation and Discipline; we shall have no occasion for it in a world of Perfection and Pleasure, which we hope to enter upon when we depart out of this. But it is of most excellent use to us whilst we are here; because, like Humility (from whence it springs) it disposes us to bear Afflictions in the best manner, and prepares us to receive from them the greatest Good. And when *it hath it's perfect Work*; that is, when it is displayed in all it's Strength and Glory of Meekness, and remains invariable, unconquered, and unmoved to the End, how lovely doth it appear in the eyes both of God and man! In a word, it lightens every Load, as it confirms and strengthens the Heart to bear it. And therefore it is with great reason that every serious and sensible soul under Affliction, makes it the matter of his most earnest Prayer.

4. Another christian Grace which Afflictions are sent to exercise and strengthen, is *Faith*.

This, as well as that I last mentioned, is proper to the present Life; after which it will be done away, and turned into Vision.

Faith

SERM.

II.

Faith is a Christian's cardinal Virtue; and operates mightily on the Soul for its Support under Afflictions, as it brings to it's near prospect the happy and everlasting Period of them all; transports it's views into the world of Bliss and Joy, with which, it assures the Soul, all the Sufferings of the present world are *not worthy to be compared*; and of which, after some thousand Years of Enjoyment there, we shall intirely lose the Remembrance. But why should I say, after some thousand Years? The very instant we enter upon those unspeakable Joys, we shall be so wholly possessed and swallowed up in them, as immediately to forget all the past Sufferings of our mortal State; or bless God for fitting us, by the means of them, for such exalted heights of Bliss. We shall then be convinced (of what we find it now so hard to persuade ourselves) that they were all designed in Mercy; all for our Good; all the effects of our heavenly Father's love, and of his steady regard to our highest Interest; that he chose better for us than we could have done for ourselves; and that if we had been left to our own choice, and could have seen to the Issue and Consequences of things,

we

we should ourselves have chosen the very Lot which he appointed us, however grievous it may *now* seem to be. For Faith enlarges our prospects, teaches us to see farther, and therefore to judge better.

But how do Afflictions strengthen and increase the Christian's Faith? Why, in the way I have just now mentioned: *viz.* as they prepare and dispose him to extend his prospects forward to another world, whereas in a time of Prosperity he is too apt to confine them to this. When the thoughtful Soul finds itself stript of the pleasures and joys of the present Life, it will naturally stretch itself forth toward some more permanent and substantial good, and contemplate the Felicities of the future state. And if it hath any good hope of a title to them, it will dwell on the supporting theme, take many a delightful excursion into the unseen world, and endeavour to penetrate the dark veil that intercepts its Glories. And by these sublime exercises of the mind, the Christian's Faith will be gradually strengthened and confirmed.

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5. Sub-

The good Fruits

5. *Submission and Resignation* to the will of God is another christian Grace that is often much improved by Affliction.

It is indeed the genuine Effect of Faith and Patience, but capable of a distinct Consideration from them: and is that happy temper of mind which our blessed Saviour exemplified under his deepest Sorrows, when he said, *O my Father, —thy Will be done* (g). When the Soul is once brought to a full and unreserved submission to the whole will of God, it is then (and never till then) at perfect rest.

Easily, An Increase of Heavenly-mindedness, is another good Fruit that is often produced by Afflictions.

And to produce this indeed they have the directest tendency. For when the Soul is well weary of this world, it will naturally begin to look out, and long for a better. It will live with Heaven more steadily in its Eye; and look upon present things in another Light; and consider them in their connexion with, and relation to, the concerns of a better World: and will adjust it's regards

(g) Mat. xxvi. 42.

gards to objects and events in proportion as they tend to subserve (not so much it's present as) it's future and everlasting Happiness.

These now are some of those *peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*, which the joyless Afflictions of this life are sent to work out, and which they actually do *work out* for many that are exercised thereby.

Why they are called *peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*; who those are that enjoy them; and what is necessary on our part, in order thereunto—were the other things I proposed to consider on this Argument. But these I must reserve for the Subject of the next Discourse. And shall conclude all at present with two brief Reflexions.

1. If so much good often comes of Afflictions, how wrong is it then for the generality of Mankind to look upon them as evil?

In Appearance indeed they are so; and in themselves they are not *joyous* (no, far from it!) but sometimes very *grievous*; and therefore *as such* are not desirable. But considered in their Effects, Tendency and End, they are often productive of the greatest good, and therefore are not to be dreaded or deprecated absolutely as real Evils. For



The good Fruits, &c.

if they were, they would never fall to the Lot of good men.

2. We hence see how a Christian is *made perfect through Sufferings*.

As they are leading him to a perfection of Grace, and fitting him for a perfection of Glory. This phrase indeed, as applied by the Apostle to the *Captain of our Salvation* (h). is to be taken in another Sense; but when applied to his Followers, it must always be taken in this.

Now may the GOD of all Grace, who hath called us to his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus, after that we have suffered a while, make us perfect, stablish, strengthen, and settle us! to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

(h) Heb. ii. 10.



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SERM.
III.

S E R M O N III.

The good FRUITS of AFFLICTIONS.

HEB. xii. 11.

*Now no chastening for the present
seemeth to be joyous, but grievous :
nevertheless afterward it yieldeth
the peaceable fruit of Righteous-
ness, unto them which are exercised
thereby.*



IN discoursing upon these Words,
I proposed

I. To consider what are those
Fruits of Righteousness which the di-
vine Chastnings are sent to produce.

The good Fruits

II. Why they are called *peaceable* Fruits of Righteousness.

III. In whom Afflictions produce these good Effects.

IV. What is necessary on our part to secure them.

Lastly, To make a proper Improvement of the Subject.

I. What are those *Fruits of Righteousness* which the divine Chastenings are sent to produce.

Which may be supposed to be such as these:

1. The Mortification of our sinful Lusts.

2. A more warm and active zeal and Diligence in the great Duties of Life and Religion.

3. The Improvement of certain divine Virtues and Graces in which we may have been too deficient. Particularly, a constant regard to God, Humility, Patience, Faith, Resignation, and Heavenly-mindedness. Each of which, afflictive Providences have a peculiar tendency to quicken and cultivate.

I proceed now to the second thing I proposed, *viz.*

II. To consider why these are called the *peaceable* Fruits of Righteousness.

And I apprehend they are so called for these two Reasons.

1. Because they will help us to bear Afflictions with the most quiet and peaceable temper of Mind whilst we are under them.

2. Because they give it an habitual Peace and Serenity afterwards.

They are called *peaceable* Fruits of Righteousness, because they help us to bear Afflictions with the most quiet and peaceable temper of Mind.

For those divine Virtues before mentioned which are oftentimes the happy Fruits of our Afflictions, are at the same time our greatest supports under them. *Piety* teaches us to look upon them as the necessary and gentle chastisements of a Father's hand, and the effect of his love. *Humility* lightens them; by laying the soul low, it causes the storm to blow over it; or by a yielding acquiescence stands out the fury of it; so the low and bending reed is safe and unbroken in the midst of those hurricanes that fell the stout and lofty oaks. *Patience* con-

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III.

firmes the Heart to bear them, collects it's strength, and prepares for the worst. *Faith* raises the soul above them. *Resignation* makes us content and satisfied under them. And *Heavenly-mindedness* looks beyond them.

How peaceable and quiet is the suffering soul, when any one of these divine graces hath its proper influence upon it! But how much more so, when they are all in lively exercise, exerting their united force and energy to support it! And I believe we need look no farther than this, and suppose no more than the vigorous efforts and efficacy of all these Graces united, strengthened, and exerted to the utmost, by the extraordinary grace and help of God's spirit, to account for the amazing and even miraculous constancy with which the primitive Martyrs sustained their greatest torments.

But, O! how contrary to this is the state of that man who is destitute of the support of all these holy dispositions in a day of deep Distress; or that is possessed and governed by the contrary! who cannot think of God but with terror; whose heart is still haughty and unsubdued; impatient, fretful, and reluctant under the galling yoke; who

who has no comfortable reflexions backward, and none but the darkest prospects forward; whose heart is still rebellious, hard and unrelenting; and still cleaves fast to the world, where all his Happiness lay, and which now fails him!

Those graces then which give the holy Soul so much Peace, Stability and Comfort under Afflictions, may properly be called the *peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*. As they also may,

2. Because they possess the mind with an habitual peace and serenity afterwards.

They give it steadiness and self-government under those adverse Events and ruffling occurrences of Life, which transport many into excess of passion, to the disturbance of their own peace and that of others.

Besides, they keep the passions in peace, under the apprehension of future evils; check the extravagant tumults of the imagination; quiet our Fears, and dispose us calmly to wait the issue. Those dreadful and distracting Fears which tear and harrow the guilty soul under the expectation of a near Calamity, find no place in the mind where the *Fruits of Righteousness* appear and flourish.

Such

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Such is the *perfect peace* of them whose mind is stayed on the Lord (a) and Great peace have they, says the Psalmist, that love thy Law, and nothing shall offend them (b).

But it may not however be improper to observe here; that the infelicity of a natural temper, and certain disorders in the animal frame, may sometimes defeat the full influence of the forementioned virtues, and deprive even the pious mind of some degrees of that serenity and peace, which they are proper to inspire. This falls but too often under common notice to need any proof. However, in general it may safely be affirmed; that when the mind is governed by the forementioned holy principles and dispositions, it will in all cases enjoy a greater peace and stability than it could enjoy without them: and that this peace will always be in proportion to the degree, in which those divine Graces exert their respective influence. And this may suffice to show the reason why the Apostle calls them the *praisable Fruits of Righteousness*; agreeably to what the Apostle James says, that the *Fruits of Righteousness are sown in peace* (c).

(a) Psal. cxv. 13. (b) Psal. cxix. 165. (c) Jam. iii. 18.

I proceed now

III. To consider who they are on whom Afflictions have this happy effect.

The Text says, it is upon them *who are exercised thereby*. But this general proposition must undoubtedly be taken with some restriction. For

1. It is most certain that all who are under Afflictions do not receive such Benefit by them,

We frequently see the contrary. Wicked men by their Obstinacy and want of thought often defeat the good effect of providential discipline, which was intended to soften and reclaim them. And *Solomon* tells us, that *though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his Folly depart from him (d)*. Nay, sometimes wicked men grow worse by those very means which make good men better. So the same sun which softens the Wax, hardens the Clay. Nay.

2. It is not every good man that reaps all those Advantages by his Afflictions I before mentioned.

At least, good men do not reap them all in the same degree. Some are but very little mended

(d) Prov. xxvii. 22.



mended by them ; soon lose the good impressions they felt ; which, like the *morning cloud* or *early dew*, at the return of the Sun, are quickly dispersed and gone. But

3. The meaning is, that the divine discipline has this design and tendency ; that Afflictions are in their own nature a proper and powerful expedient to reform the mind and make the heart better ; and to procure the greatest spiritual benefit to those *who are exercised thereby*. And

Lastly, That they actually have this effect upon those who take a proper care to improve them.

For they are but means, after all ; and operate and take effect the same way that all other means do ; that is, by being carefully used, attended to, and improved by us. For the best means, if neglected, or misimproved, will fall of their intended effect. Which fitly introduces the last thing I proposed, which was

IV. To consider what is necessary on our part to procure these happy Fruits of Affliction ; or in what manner we are to behave, that they may actually yield to us the peace-

ble

of Afflictions.

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ble Fruits of Righteousness whenever we are exercised thereby.

This now is a matter of considerable concern to us all. Not only because we are continually liable to Afflictions of one kind or another, either personal or relative, temporal or spiritual; but because we see they are intended for our greatest good in this state of discipline and trial; and if they be not improved, they are more than lost; if we be not the better, we shall in all likelihood be the worse for them.

Now in order to secure those happy Fruits of Affliction before mentioned, these three things are necessary, viz.

Serious Thought,
Constant Watchfulness, and
Fervent Prayer.

And these are equally necessary, both whilst our Afflictions are continued, and when they are removed.

1. The first thing necessary on our part in order to improve Affliction is serious Thought or deep self-reflexion.

And at such a time, provided the intellectual Powers be not disordered, the Mind is generally best disposed to this employment.

If

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If any thing can make us serious and thoughtful, a fore calamity will; especially if the event be hazardous, and we have reason to fear the worst. Then the soul recollects itself, and begins to think in good earnest; is no longer satisfied with vain hopes, wrong lights, and false appearances; but goes to the bottom of things, searches the Foundation, takes a wide scope and review of its present temper, and past conduct; and is most anxiously solicitous for some solid bottom to rest upon.

Then the promises of the divine word are precious, and the soul is very desirous to know, whether it may apply them and take the comfort of them or not. This will naturally put it upon a diligent self-research; to see whether it has indeed those Characters and qualifications to which those promises are made and limited. For without this it dares not, it cannot extract the least consolation from them: Be they ever so refreshing, it cannot come at them, and whenever they are suggested, will be ready to reply in the words of the Samaritan woman to our Saviour, *alas! I have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; whence then can I come at these*
living

living waters (e)? Tell him that he must apply them by Faith, and he is ready to answer; "If I have not indeed the qualifications of those to whom these promises are made, that Faith will be presumption. And in this case to apply the promises, is like healing up the wound that wants to be searched; which makes the case but worse. No; shew me but my sincerity in the midst of all my defects, that the love and fear of God have ruled in my heart, with a real, if but a weak influence; that God is my reconciled Father through the merits and intercession of Christ; let my conscience bring in this testimony, and I am satisfied. Then I can, and may, and will take the comfort of the promises; otherwise I cannot." This now, I say, puts the mind upon the most deep and serious self-research; and brings it into the best frame to receive the most solid comfort.

2. A constant watchfulness under our Afflictions is equally necessary to our receiving real good from them.

And the necessity of this arises from the well known inconstancy of our good frames.

We

(e) John iv. 11.

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We should therefore watch over our tempers and dispositions; to keep them even, undisturbed and regular.——For adversity is attended with Temptations that are no less apt to deprive us of our self-command, than those of prosperity. And one principal means of getting good by Affliction, is to keep the mind in a proper frame to receive it; by cultivating an habitual contentment, resignation and meekness, and watching against every thing that may tend to excite the contrary dispositions. We carefully watch the several turns and symptoms of our bodily distempers, why should we not as diligently attend to the symptoms and changes in the distempers of our souls, which the former are sometimes sent to cure?

3. Another means to get good by Afflictions is frequent, fervent and persevering prayer.

That God would help us to preserve a temper of spirit suited to suffering circumstances, and prepare our Hearts to receive the good intended by them; that he would please to strengthen, support, and encourage us, assist our faith and contemplations, compose

pose and establish our minds, and fit us for the final issue. SERM. III.

These things are necessary on our part if we would receive real benefit from our troubles.

But on the other hand, if a person remains thoughtless, stupid, and inattentive to the frame of his own spirit, and either wholly neglects the duty of Prayer, or performs it in a light, formal, or superficial manner; if thus, I say, he behaves under his Afflictions, how is it likely, how is it possible, his spiritual state should be at all the better for them? no, the *Fruits of Righteousness* will never spring up in so neglected and barren a soil.

And the same serious thought, watchfulness, and prayer are as necessary after Afflictions as they are under them.----Otherwise the mind will soon contract it's former obliquity, and bad habits.

When God is pleased to restore to us our wonted comforts and capacities, we should in our most serious minutes *recollect* what good we have gained by our Afflictions; what *Fruits of Righteousness* they have produced; what Lusts they have mortified; what Virtues improved; how we behaved

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under them ; what good impressions we then felt, and whether we still retain them ; what good purposes we then formed, and whether we still keep them ; and what peculiar obligations we are now under to a stricter walk with God, in the exercise of all the virtues of a pious and holy Life ; that we may be the better prepared for the next trial we are to meet.

Constant Watchfulness is also no less requisite when we emerge out of deep distress ; to put us on our guard against those sins, and all the occasions of those sins which, it may be, then lay with a heavy weight on our Conscience ; and to excite us to greater diligence in those duties, the too great neglect of which we then sincerely lamented ; that we do not *return like a dog to his vomit, or as a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

And *fervent Prayer* is especially necessary that God would be pleased to continue and strengthen the pious purposes we formed, and help us to perform the vows we made to him in the days of our distress. That he would please by his grace to correct the vanity and levity of our hearts, and enable us to think as seriously and as justly in a time

of health and prosperity, as we are disposed to do in a time of sickness and adversity. SERM.
III.

If we proceed stedfastly in this wise and pious course, we may in time hope, through divine grace to receive all the forementioned *Fruits of Righteousness*, which the divine chastenings are sent to produce. Thus shall we be enabled to extract honey from the gall, gather strength from weakness, convert our sorrows into gladness, and turn apparent evils into real good.

I shall now conclude with a few reflexions on the whole subject.

1. We hence learn that it is a great mistake to think, as some good christians are ready to do, that all Afflictions are sent in a way of Anger, and are tokens of God's displeasure against them.

The contrary to this is true. They are sent out of Love. *Whom the Lord loves he chastens*; as it is in verse the sixth before the text. If they are sent as the proper means to increase these peaceable and salutary *Fruits of Righteousness*, how is it in a way of anger? Is it in anger that a parent obliges his child to submit to a nauseous potion or a painful operation

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ration for the recovery of it's health? Or that a tender Father corrects his child for it's good? In the former case there is no sign of anger at all; and in the latter, an equal sign of love. (a).

Never, I believe, did any good christian see the least reason to regret the severest Afflictions he ever met with. Many, I am sure, have been thankful for them all their days, as the greatest blessings they ever received. So exactly does God proportion the Degrees of Affliction to the necessity of the case.

Afflictions do a Christian no more harm than persecutions do the church, which always purify, purge and strengthen it. And as an ancient Divine expresses it, *God's Vines are always the better for bleeding.*

2. From what hath been said upon this subject we may distinctly see what it is to have *Afflictions sanctified.*

A

(a) *The kind and chief design of God in all his severest dispensations is, to melt and soften our hearts to such degrees as he finds necessary, in order to the good purposes of his grace; and so to dispose and prepare them every way as that they may become fit mansions for his holy spirit to dwell in.*

Atterbury's Sermons, Vol. II, page 200.

A Phrase, I believe, that is much oftener used than understood. For when we pray, that Afflictions may be *sanctified to us*, we mean no more in reality, than that we may be *sanctified by them*: Or that by the grace of God they may become the effectual means of making us more holy; by subduing the bad Habits of our mind, and cultivating all the good and pious Affections there. So that Afflictions are only then sanctified, when (according to the Phrase in the text) they *yield the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*. In order to which, I have just observed, there is much to be done on our part, if we either know what we mean, or are sincere in that Prayer. For in vain do we desire that Afflictions may be sanctified, if we do not use our best Endeavours that they may be so; that is, that we may become the better for them.

I have really been grieved to see some Christians, who have made a high Profession of Religion, to lie under the power of a fretful, repining, discontented and impatient Spirit, when the Hand of God was upon them, using [passionate, and unbecom-



ing Expressions, to the great Disturbance of themselves, and all about them; and at the same time crying out, *O, that this great Affliction may be sanctified!* when it was apparent, that they either knew not what they meant by that Expression (which they had taken up from others, and learned by rote) or else were not sincere in what they prayed for. Because at the very same time they indulged that frame of Spirit which would absolutely prevent their Afflictions being sanctified, or themselves being the better for them. For Afflictions are then sanctified, and then only, when they increase our Love to God, our Humility, our Patience, our Faith, Resignation and Heavenly-mindedness.

3. What reason have we to adore the Wisdom and Goodness of our heavenly Father in laying his Children under those afflicting Dispensations which are necessary to their true interest.

And he never sends them but when he knows they are so. We may possibly think otherwise, but in our own case we often think amiss. Children are not always competent

of Afflictions.

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petent Judges of what is good for them: Because they are ignorant of their true Interest, and judge only by Appearances: And were they to have all they desired, and be excused from every thing they disliked, they would soon be ruined. But our heavenly Father knows our Interest better than we do, and therefore chuses for us better than we can; and out of Love to us will send us that which he knows to be for our Good, whether we think so or not. And much of his Goodness and Wisdom is seen in the kind, duration, degree and seasonableness of our Afflictions; which will very plainly appear to the Mind that attentively considers those several Circumstances that attend them.

4. What hath been said may tend to prepare us to meet the future Sufferings of Life, and teach us how to bear them.

It may not be long, perhaps, ere some of us are called to put these seasonable Instructions into Practice. Let us not be over-secure of our present Peace: we know not how soon a sudden Storm may succeed our Calm. In a state so variable as this,

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things

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things can never continue long in the same posture. The Scene will soon shift. It is our Wisdom to be in a readiness to meet all changes: To be armed against the worst, and prepared for the best; by cultivating those holy Affections of the heart, and that heavenly Temper of mind, which will be our best Support under the one, and our best Preparation for the other; and which alone can fit us for that State of everlasting Rest, *where all Tears shall be wiped away from the Eyes; where there shall be no more Death, nor Sorrow, nor Crying, and where there shall be no more Pain, (f).*

Lastly, How little reason have we to be very fond of a world so subject to Vicissitude, Anxiety, and Sorrow!

Surely, he that is most indifferent to this World makes the wisest Estimate of it. But how very wrong are the notions which Men in general entertain concerning it! Especially they who have drank deep of, and intoxicated themselves with its Vanities! ——— *saith the sensual and covetous Man,*

(f) Rev. lxxi. 4.

of Afflictions.

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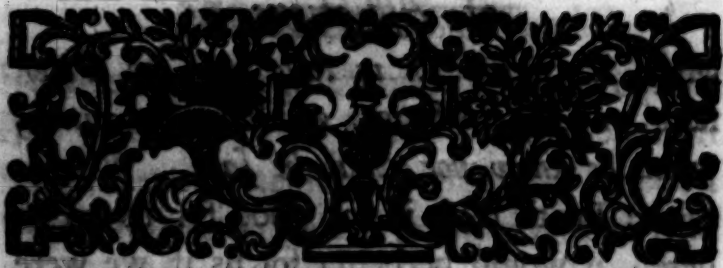
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Man, *It is good for us to be here, as Peter*
said on the Mount of Transfiguration,
when he knew not what he said. Where-
as the Truth is, it is not good for us to be
here; it would be better for us if we were
not here; and it will never be well with
us till we are gone hence.



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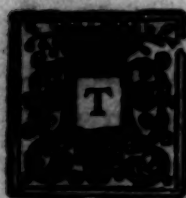
S E R M O N IV.

The WORD of GOD the FOOD of
the SOUL.



I COR. iii. 2.

*I have fed you with Milk, and not
with Meat.*



HIS is the Account which the
Apostle *Paul* gives of his Mi-
nisty among the *Corinthians*;
or the general method and
course of his preaching to them. *I have fed
you with Milk and not with Meat; for hi-
therto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet
now are ye able.*

The phrase is metaphorical; and indeed
there are several Metaphors couch'd in it. *e. g.*
the

The Word of God, &c.

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the spiritual Life is here compared to the natural Life; the Word of God, which is the Food of the Soul, is compared to our natural Food; Ministers, as *the Stewards of God*, (o) are the Dispensers of it; and the People are they to whom it is dispensed, for their spiritual Growth and Refreshment.

Agreeably to these metaphorical Characters, the Apostle tells the *Corinthians* what care he took to feed them *with Food convenient for them*. For from several Passages in these two Letters of his to the Church at *Corinth* it appears, that there were many weak Christians among them; whom he might justly stile, (as he does in the Verse preceeding the Text) *Babes in Christ*. And therefore he says, as such he had fed them *with Milk* (the proper Food of Babes) *and not with Meat*; which is a Diet more fit for Persons of Strength and Maturity.

What I propose from the Words, is only to consider and improve the Metaphor they contain; which carries in it this Proposition, *viz.*

(o) *Tit. i. 7.*

The Word of God
That the Word of God is the proper Food of the Soul.

This is a Metaphor frequently used in Scripture and other Writings. I design particularly to consider and examine it, and pursue it as far as it will naturally and fairly go; it being a very happy Simile, full of Instruction, and fitly adapted to set many things relating to this Subject in a clear and easy Light.

I. Then I shall explain and open the Metaphor to you. And

II. Make a proper Improvement of it.

I. I am to explain and open the Metaphor to you; by shewing you how properly the Word of God may be called the *Food of the Soul*.

Thus it is represented in the Text and in several other Scriptures. *e. g.* 1 *Pet.* ii. 2. Where the Apostle *Peter* uses an Expression much like this of the Apostle *Paul*. *As new born Babies desire the sincere Milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby.* So *Heb.* v. 12—14. *Ye are become such as have need of Milk, and not of strong Meat. For every one that*

the Food of the Soul.

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that useth Milk is unskilful in the Word of Righteousness; for he is a Babe: but strong Meat belongeth to them that are of full Age.

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Agreeably to the same Metaphor, the Author to the Hebrews speaks of *tasting the good Word of God, (a).* And Job says he *esteemed it more than his necessary Food, (b).* And David, that the Word of God was *sweeter than Honey to his Mouth, (c).* All in allusion to the Metaphor we are now about to explain: To illustrate which let us now view the Parallel between this spiritual Food of the Soul, and the natural Food of the Body.

And that the Simplicity and Uniformity of the Parallel may not become dull and tedious, (as Discourses of this kind sometimes do) I shall make a suitable Application of of each Head as I proceed: Which will diversify the Subject, and at the same time render it more entertaining and improving.

1. Then, our common Food is given us for the Strength, Support, and Refreshment of the Body: And the Word of God is given

(a) Heb. vi. 5

(b) Job. xxiii. 12.

(c) Psal. xix. 11.

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given us for the Strength, Support, and Refreshment of the Soul.

The natural Life cannot be supported without the Help of common Food, nor the spiritual Life without that of the divine Word. Hence the pious Soul receives it's Strength when weak and fainting, and it's most reviving Cordials when low and languishing. A well adapted Text of Scripture suggested to the Mind, seriously considered, and set home with power on the Heart, yields it a very sensible Support and Refreshment when nothing else can.

This the pious *Psalmist* often tells us was his Experience: And I doubt not but every holy Soul since his Time can say the same. For true Grace is the same in every one, and excites the same Desires and Dispositions in all; and is generally best known by the Esteem the Soul hath for the Word of God and the Delight it takes therein.

And I may add, as our natural Food is never more sweet and refreshing than when we are faint and hungry, so the Word of God is never more dear and reviving to the Soul than in it's most weak and distressed Condition. Afflictions always endear the Word
of

the Food of the Soul.

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of God to a pious Mind, because they give the most sensible Proof of it's Power to quicken, comfort, and revive it. This is verified by daily Observation.

And should not this Consideration now excite in us an Appetite for this spiritual Food? We are sensible enough of the urgent Cravings of our natural Appetites, and are not easy till they are satisfied. Were the Soul in it's right State, it would have the same longing Desires after it's spiritual Food, as the Body has after it's natural. And happy are they that thus *hunger and thirst after Righteousness, for they shall be filled, (d)*

Hence also we may safely judge of the Health of the Soul, and the Goodness of our spiritual State. That is, by the Desires we have after the Word of God, and the spiritual Refreshment we derive from thence. — But to proceed.

2. As the most wholesome Food will not nourish the Body unless it be digested, so the most wholesome Doctrines and the most important Truths of the divine Word will

(d) Mat. v. 6.

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do the Soul no good unless they are seriously thought of, considered and applied.

Meditation is that Action of the Mind, which in the animal Nature answers to that of Digestion; hence the Word *ruminate* is applied to both. When applied to the Mind it signifies to revolve any thing there in order to Meditation: When applied to the Body it signifies chewing the Cud to forward Digestion; which is the original Sense of the Word *ruminate*. As the Body receives no Nourishment unless the Aliment it takes in be retained, separated and well digested; so the Word of God will be of no Advantage to our spiritual Growth and Refreshment unless we remember, compare and meditate upon it. If it be soon forgot, we can expect no more Benefit from it than from the Food which passes off before it's first Concoction. Or if we never think of or seriously apply what we read or hear, it will no more refresh the Soul than undigested Meats do the Body. Nay, as these often turn to Choler and create ill Humours in the Body, so the Word of God often read and heard but never seriously attended to or solemnly applied to the Conscience,

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the Food of the Soul.

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sometimes does more harm than good, and tends to lead the Mind into a Habit of Formality, Lukewarmness and Hypocrisy.

The proper Inference then from hence is, in our Saviour's Words, *to take heed how we hear, (c).* To consider what real good we get by the Ordinances of GOD on which we stately attend, and the Duties of Religion in which we so often engage. The most solemn Ordinances, the most important Duties, the most awakening Word, and the most useful Means, may all fail of success and turn to no account, for want of this one Thing, viz. The attentive Recollection and close Application of what we read and hear and know to our own Consciences. And if we examine the Matter carefully, perhaps we may find this to be the chief Cause that we have made such slow Improvements in the religious Life, under so many Advantages and Means of Grace and Knowledge. As a little Food well digested turns more to the Nourishment of the Body than a great deal that is not, so a little Knowledge well improved makes a sounder

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and

(c) Luke viii. 18.

SERM. and better Christian than a great deal that is
IV. neglected or mis-improved.

3. *As Man liveth not by Bread alone, but by the Word of Blessing which proceedeth out of the Mouth of God,* so it is the Blessing of God upon his Word that makes it effectual to the support of the spiritual Life.

It is God that gives the nourishing Quality to the Food we eat; and hath given to our animal Frame it's several Powers to prepare, digest and separate it, for the Health and Growth of the Body. And it is God that gives the beneficial Efficacy to his Word; which is not sufficient of itself to promote the Christian's spiritual Growth; as is evident from the Case of those who have sat under the hearing of it all their Days to no purpose. It is ours indeed to attend carefully upon it, and often to recollect and apply it, (especially in our most serious frames and seasons of retirement) without which we can expect no Benefit from it. But still it is the Blessing of God that gives it all it's saving Power and Efficacy. It is the Grace of God that opens the Heart to receive it, that assists our Meditations upon it, and so makes that a *quickenings Spirit* which

the Food of the Soul.

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which would be otherwise a *dead Letter*. And hence it is that the Gospel which is the *Savour of Death unto Death* unto some, is to others *the Savour of Life unto Life*, (f).

What is the proper Inference from hence then, but that as we ordinarily crave a Blessing upon our natural Food, we should do the same upon our spiritual; and never come to an Ordinance without first lifting up our hearts to God, that we may be the better for it; that our Souls may receive some real and lasting benefit by it. And this Prayer for the Blessing of God upon his Ordinances, should be made in a solemn Manner before we come to the House of God, and not only in that short ejaculatory way which some use as soon as they have taken their place there.

4. As God hath been pleased to give us our temporal Food in great plenty and variety, suited to our several Tastes, just so hath he been pleased to dispense to us our spiritual Food.

We may look upon it as an Instance of the Bounty and Indulgence of our heavenly Father, that he hath been pleased to furnish us with so many things proper for the Sup-

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port

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port and Refreshment of our Bodies. That when other Animals are confined to one or two kinds of Food, some to Herbs, some to Flesh, and some to Seeds; our animal Natures are so prepared as to derive a suitable Nourishment from so great a variety of things which afford no Delight or Nourishment to inferior Animals: that the Earth, Sea and Air pour out their Stores to furnish our Table: that the animal and vegetable World so plentifully contribute to the Gratification of our Palate. Nor hath our bountiful Creator been less kind to our Souls in this respect than he hath been to our Bodies. For are not the same ample Provisions made for the Supply and Support of the spiritual Life: Have we not *Line upon Line and Precept upon Precept*? Are we not led into *green Pastures*? Is there not a Table richly spread and furnished for our Souls? And the most refreshing and delightful Repasts prepared for them in the Word and Ordinances of God.

Is not the Word of God in particular adapted to the taste and refreshment of every hungry Soul, be it's Case, Condition and Wants what they will? Here is *Milk for Babes,*

the Food of the Soul.

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Babes, and strong Meat for those of full Age.

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IV.

Doctrines and Instructions, Precepts and Directions in great Variety, suited to the several Cases and Capacities of Mankind.

As in the Palates of Men there is a great difference of Taste with regard to their natural Food, so in their Souls there is a great difference of Taste with regard to their spiritual Food. As some are much more desirous of one kind of Diet than others are, from a difference in their natural Taste, so some have a greater relish for one kind of Doctrines than others have from a like difference in their spiritual Taste. Not but that all real Christians are agreed in their esteem for the great Essentials of Religion (as all healthful Constitutions have the same Taste for the most substantial and wholesome Food) yet they may have different Sentiments of, and a different Relish for some other less necessary Parts of it, by reason of this difference in their religious Taste. And hence it is that some are more affected with, find more comfort and edification from, and consequently have a higher Esteem for, one sort of Christian Doctrines, and some for another; though both perhaps be equally in-

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structive, important and useful ; and equally conducive to the same great End, to form the Mind to vital Holiness, a supreme Love to God and a Fitness for Heaven. ✓

That there is such a difference of Taste in human Minds with regard to the Objects of natural Knowledge is most certain, and I think it is no less certain that there is the same with regard to the Objects of religious Knowledge. And if this be true, I am sure it is a very pacific Consideration : and when duly attended to, cannot fail to have a happy Influence to cool and meliorate the Minds of Men in their religious Disputes.

Which indeed is the proper use of this Observation, to promote a Spirit of Love and Concord among Christians of different Taste and Sentiments in Religion. For if you are displeased with another purely because he is not so much attached to some unessential Doctrines of Christianity as you are, you act just as wise a part, as if you were angry with him because he does not so much admire your particular kind of Diet. A Man hath the same reason to be angry with a Child, because it loves Milk more than Meat ; or a Child with a Man, because he chuses
Meat

the Food of the Soul.

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Meat rather than Milk. And to call others unsound on account of such little diversity of of Sentiments in Religion is just the same as to say, "A Man cannot have a good and "healthful Constitution because he does not "eat as I do; or that such a kind of Food "is Poison, because I do not like it." though we see at the same time it is a means of supporting a healthful Constitution in others.

The different Tastes, Tempers, Dispositions and Capacities of Men, together with their peculiar make and turn of Mind, and the particular Impressions they have early received, are the reasons, and the only reasons we know of, that there is such a Diversity of Sentiments among them relating to the Nature, Evidence and Importance of some disputed Points. And into these it should always be resolved; and not imputed (as it often is) to an *unsoundness in the Faith*, or *heretical Pravity*; which can never be without a bad Heart, of which we are very incompetent Judges.

It is an Instance of the great Goodness of our heavenly Father, that foreseeing the Variety there would be in the several Tastes and Capacities of Men, he hath made such

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various Provision in his Word suitably adapted to them all. And therefore instead of censuring others who are of different Sentiments from ourselves, we ought to be thankful that the Father of our Spirits hath made such suitable Provision for our Souls, whereby he is fitting us all for the same final Happiness.

5. As the Body stands in continual need of it's natural Food, so the Soul stands in continual need of it's spiritual Food.

We need frequent Supplies for the Recruit of our natural Strength. Those we receive to Day will not serve To-morrow. It is not so much the large Quantity of Food we take at one time, as the good Digestion of the little we take at stated and seasonable Times, that contributes to the Health of the Body: so it is not the Length of our Devotions, so much as the seriousness fervour and frequency of them, that promotes the Health and Vigour of our Souls.

Hence it is that the Word of God so frequently calls us to those holy Exercises of Religion by which the spiritual Life is maintain'd; especially those two great Duties of Prayer and Thanksgiving, to which we should

always preserve an habitual Disposition; to which nothing contributes more than a frequent converse with God in his Word and by his Providences; and in which his holy Spirit is always ready to assist us, as well as in our more solemn and public Devotions in his House. And without a frequent supply of spiritual Strength by this means, our Souls will grow languid and lukewarm, and degenerate more and more into a sensual, secure, and carnal Temper.

The proper use of this Observation is to excite us to greater fervour and frequency in our Devotions, a daily converse with Word of God, and a diligent attendance on the Ordinances of his Worship. For I dare appeal to the experience of every one who has taken any care to observe the frame of his own Spirit, whether he does not find his spiritual decays to be in proportion to his neglect of these Duties, or the lifeless and indevout manner in which they are performed. ~~X~~ Once more

6. As it is a sign the body is under an ill habit when it hath no relish for it's common Food, so it is a sign of some sad disorder

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der in the Soul when it hath no relish for the Word of God.

A Person in health indeed may not have so quick a Gust for some sort of Food as he hath for some other, yet if he loath the most wholesome and nourishing Food because it is plain and common, it is a sign there is something amiss in him: so, though some sort of Books and Sermons be not so exactly adapted to our taste as others, yet if we have no taste for plain, serious, practical preaching, and especially if we find no pleasure in reading the scriptures themselves, this is a Symptom of some very bad disorder in our Souls; or that they languish under some spiritual Distemper because they have lost their spiritual Taste.

By this then let us examine the state of our own Souls, and see if all be right there. How do we relish the plain important Truths of the Word of God? Do we feel in them a force and life and energy, that captivates the Soul, subdues the Heart, over-bears our carnal Prejudices, and excites in us a more ardent Love for it? Then we may conclude the Soul is in Health, and the spiritual Life in it's Vigour. But if, on the other hand,

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we find no such real desire after or delight in the Word or Ordinances of God, but can read the one and attend the other in a customary, indevout and careless manner, this is a very unhappy but sure Symptom of a spiritual Decay.

I shall prosecute the Parallel no further. The fore-mentioned particulars may suffice to shew the obvious Analogy there is between our natural and spiritual Food, which the Metaphor in the Text was designed to denote. I come now

II. To make a more particular improvement of this Discourse.

And what hath been said upon this Subject may aptly suggest to us several things that are peculiarly instructive both to Ministers and People.

I. To Ministers, who are the Dispensers of this spiritual Food.

These are called the *Stewards of the Mysteries of God*, (f), and *Stewards of the manifold Grace of God*, (g). And therefore as such, their Duty is to acquit themselves as *faithful Stewards*; to give to every one their

Portion

(f) Cor. iv. 1.

(g) 1 Pet. iv. 10.

Portion in due Season, and to feed them with Food convenient for them. More particularly

1. To feed them with *wholsome* Food, To see that they do not mix poison with it, by corrupting the Word of God through a too great veneration for the Doctrines and Decisions of Men.

The great business of a Minister in his publick Office is to open, explain, enforce and urge the pure Word of God, and to withhold nothing that is profitable to the Souls of Men; to consult the Edification of his Hearers, more than his own Applause; and good of Souls, more than the credit of his Character as an elegant and polite Preacher; to study and learn their spiritual wants by his own; and so to adapt his Discourses to them that the hungry may not go away disappointed, but comforted, strengthened, refreshed and satisfied. †

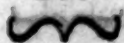
2. They should feed them with the most *solid* and *substantial* Food. Not entertain them with doubtful Speculations, philosophical Disquisitions, or affected oratorical Harangue; which only please the Imagination, amuse the Mind, but never reach the Heart.

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Heart. What is the most elegant Desert to a hungry Appetite, in comparison of solid meat? Sillabubs and Sweet-meats may gratify the Palate, but they do not satisfy the Appetite so well as more plain substantial Food. And to entertain a Congregation of plain illiteral Christians with an elaborate philosophical Dissertation which they do not understand, is the same kind of Incongruity as to invite them to a Feast, and set before them nothing but the most exquisite and far-fetched Dainties, which they never saw and for which they have no taste. Therefore

3. Ministers as *Stewards of the Mysteries of God*, should feed his Servants with the most *suitable* Food. That is, the subject of their Discourses and manner of treating them should be adapted, as far as it conveniently may, to their Capacities and Tastes. They should apply, in the first place, to the Understanding, and then by well chosen Topics and serious Address endeavour to touch the Heart. The Understanding must be convinced before the Affections can be rightly moved. For to excite the Affections by mere dint of Sound and Vehemence may amuse

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use and amaze the Mind, but strikes out no more Light than a stroke on a Drum-head. Nor should the Address, either to the Understanding or Affections, be stiff, studied, violent and over-bearing; but soft, easy, simple and insinuating; that steals directly into the Heart, without any noise or bustle by the way. In thus adapting the Subject and Address to the Taste and Capacity of a vulgar Audience, the Preacher may run the risk of his Reputation, perhaps, with some over-nice and critical Hearers with whom nothing will go down but what is prepared with the utmost art and delicacy; but he will be acquitted and approved by every sensible and judicious Hearer. But

II. This Subject suggests several things peculiar to the Instruction of Hearers. *e. g.*

1. That they be not over-nice in their spiritual Diet. A squeamish Stomach is an ill sign of Health: a Christian that hath a true Appetite for the Word of Life, will not be over-critical as to the manner in which it is dispensed.

The Circumstances under which every Minister preaches in every Congregation are sufficient

sufficient to demand the Candour of all his Hearers.—It is possible we may not know what your Capacities are; and if we did, it is possible that with all our Endeavour we may not be able to speak exactly to them.—It may be we do not know all your particular Tastes; or if we did, it is impossible to please them all, they are so different; or if we could please them all, perhaps we should not think it our Duty so to do. That Food is not always the most wholesome that is the most palatable; especially if the Palate be depraved and vitiated. Some may think that they can digest strong Meat, when (with the *Corinthians*) they ought rather to be fed with Milk. And if Christians find no Benefit, no Edification by plain, serious, practical Preaching, the fault really lies more in themselves than in their Ministers; whose Business is not to attempt, that which is impossible, to preach to every one's Taste, but to aim at that which they judge most conducive to the Edification of the Whole.

2. Do not expect all from your Ministers. A great deal lies upon yourselves. As I said before, the purest, plainest and most wholesome Food will not turn to the Nourishment

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IV.



ment of the Body unless it be retained and digested; so the purest and most important Doctrines will be lost upon you, if you take no care to recollect, revolve and apply them. Our Saviour hath cautioned us to take care *how we hear* as well as *what we hear*.

But more is to be expected from the efficacious Blessing of God upon his Word, which we should not fail earnestly to pray for. And, perhaps, if you have found but little Benefit from the appointed Means of Grace, it may be owing to this cause more than any other, *viz.* a want of constant serious Prayer for a Blessing upon them. For though PAUL *may plant, and APOLLOS water, it is GOD that giveth the Increase*, and his Blessing that secures the Crop. And may be *that ministers Seed to the Sower, both minister Bread for your Food, and multiply the Seed sown, and increase the Fruits of your Righteousness; that being increased in every thing, ye may be fruitful in every good Work, to the Praise of him who hath called you to his Kingdom and Glory!*

S E R-



S E R M O N V.

The IMPERFECTION of our present
KNOWLEDGE.



I CORINTH. xiii. 12.

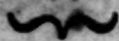
*For now we see through a Glass
darkly, but then face to face: Now
I know in part, but then shall I
know even as also I am known.*



WE can scarce have a more uncomfortable View of the present Life than that which these Words exhibit to us; that it is a State of *Darkness* and *Ignorance*: Nor a more pleasing one than that which it gives

H

us



The Imperfection of

us of the future Life; that it is a State of *Light and Knowledge.*

Whilst we are here, we are in the dark. *Clouds and thick Darknefs are round about us,* involve our Faculties and vail the Objects of Science. So that our present Knowledge at best is very partial, defective, and indistinct. But O, that blessed World of Light! What will be our Knowledge there? *When rising from the Bed of Death, we rub the Dust from off our Eyes,* emerge out of our Obscurity, to take a full, clear, satisfying Sight of things we now but dimly discern, and of a thousand other glorious Objects we never once conceived of! When our Soul will be satisfied with (that which is it's proper Food, but what in vain it seeks and longs for now) suitable, sublime, and substantial Knowledge!

For the Apostle in the Text is evidently comparing our present, with our future Knowledge: The former he speaks of in the most diminishing, the latter in the most exalted Terms. My Business then is to consider each of them particularly, according to the Representation which the Apostle here gives us of them; and then to improve the

our present Knowledge.

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the Subject with a suitable Application. SERM.

And,

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I. Let us take a view of our *present* Knowledge according to the Representation which the Apostle here gives us of it.

And in order to this, I shall

I. Consider the Properties of it which he here mentions.

II. Shew you what kind of Knowledge he here speaks of.

III. Assign the Reasons of it's present Defects.

I. I shall consider the Properties of our present Knowledge which the Apostle here mentions.

Which are these four.

1. It is partial,

2. Indistinct.

3. Uncertain.

4. It is like that of Children.

1. It is but a partial Knowledge.

Now, says the Apostle, *I know but in part.*

He had asserted the same in *verse* the ninth.

This now may refer either to the extent or degree of our Knowledge; or, which is all

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one, to the objects or nature of our present Knowledge. For whilst our Souls are confined in Flesh, there are but very few things comparatively that we know any thing at all of, and of those things which we have some notice of, how poor, how low, and partial is our Knowledge!

1. Then, this may refer to the extent or objects of our Knowledge.

Whilst the Soul is imprisoned in the Body, and looks through the narrow Casements of Sense, it can have but a very contracted View of Things. There are not many Objects that pass before it's eye which are worth contemplating, and those are mostly of a low, inferior nature; relating to the Interests and Affairs of the present mortal World, which we shall very soon have done with. But as to that invisible World to which our Spirits must go when released from the Prison of the Flesh (tho' the sacred Scriptures have thrown a little glimmering light upon it, yet still) how indistinct, confused and imperfect are those Ideas which the inquisitive Mind, after all it's utmost stretch and labour of Thought, is able to attain

our present Knowledge.

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attain of it! How little do we know *what* SERM.
we shall be! V.

Few are those things which we know, in comparison of those we might know; much fewer in comparison of those which we know nothing of, whilst our Faculties are so confined, obscured, and feeble. Compare the Views of a Worm or any minuter Insect, with those of a Man who has the largest and most comprehensive Sight of the Works of Nature; and you have a faint Image of the unknown Difference there is between our *present* and *future* Sphere of Knowledge. And,

2. We know but *in part* even those few things that do fall within the compass of our present Knowledge.

Our Intelligence is very defective with regard to the Degree as well as the Objects of it. How little do we know of those things which we pretend to have the best Acquaintance with! And which we have the greatest Helps and Advantages of attaining the Knowledge of! I mean sensible, material Objects. There is not the least particle of Matter we see, or the least dust of Earth we tread on, but what puzzles the most

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penetrating and philosophic Minds. We see only the outside of things, their external Properties, their Dimensions, Form, Figure and Colour; but as to their *Essence* or internal Substance, the Cohesion of their constituent Parts, and the Laws of that Cohesion, we can give no account at all of them.

And if we know so little of material, how much less do we know of spiritual Substances? Which we have much fewer Helps and Opportunities of being acquainted with.

And if we examine our Knowledge of abstracted Truths, or points of Speculation and Reason, how very defective does it appear! Let us take (for Instance) our Ideas or Notions of moral Rectitude, the Boundary or essential Difference between right and wrong, fit and unfit, good and evil, which in part are engraven on the Hearts of all Mankind; and which, considering the Light thrown upon these Points both from Reason and Revelation, one would be apt to think we should have the most perfect Knowledge of; yet even in these Points how widely different and contradictory are the Sentiments of men! and those not of mean and vulgar Minds,

Minds, but Persons of great Distinction and Learning! so that what is very fit and right in the Eyes of some, is very unfit and wrong in the Eyes of others. Which difference of Sentiments is owing to the Prejudices they received in their Education, which make them see things in a different Light. For be the Sight ever so good, yet if we look through a false Medium, the Object will appear discoloured or distorted. And the bias of Education is the Medium through which the eye of the Mind looks in judging of mental Objects. So that (which is a mortifying thought!) that same Knowledge which some value themselves very highly upon, will at last be placed to the Account of downright Ignorance. So partial is our Knowledge! so defective, even in those very few plain things which we may and ought to know better. But

2. Our Knowledge is not only partial (*we know but in part*) but very *Indistinct*. *We see through a Glass.*

The Apostle is here comparing our present Knowledge of future things with the View we have of distant Objects by the help of a Telescope or perspective Glass; which brings



The Imperfection of

brings them nearer and represents them plainer than they appear at a Distance to the naked Eye, but not so distinctly by far as they appear to the naked Eye near at hand.

This Glass is twofold, *Reason* and *Faith*; by which we realize and represent to the Mind future, distant, and invisible things. And happy is it for us that we have these excellent Glasses to assist the eye of the Mind, whose sight without the help of both would be very short and very defective. ~

But the Unhappiness of it is, that these Glasses though very excellent in themselves, are often obscured and spoiled by the Mists of Errors, Passions and Prejudices which hang upon them, and make them unable to penetrate through the Darkness which lies between them and the distant Objects they are intended to discern; which render our sight of those Objects very obscure and indistinct. Not to say that Imagination, as a false Medium, often comes between, which enormously magnifies some Objects and diminishes others as much. So that though the eye of the Mind be ever so good, strong and vigorous in itself, yet whilst it looks through such obscure Glasses, and so false a Medium,

it

it can have but a very confused and imperfect Preception of those things it endeavours thereby to discover. A very lively Emblem this, to set forth the Disadvantages and Defects of the human Understanding in it's present state of Imperfection, when exercised and employed about future and invisible Things. But

3. Our present Knowledge is not only very confined and indistinct, but very *uncertain* also.

Our perception of those very few things which fall within the compass of our Knowledge, is not only vague and dim, but sometimes quite wrong. Our best Knowledge is often but mere Conjecture, and that Conjecture may depend only on mere Fancy, arising from a particular state or motion of the animal Spirits, and resting more on mechanical than rational Supports. For we not only see through a Glass, but *darkly*.

The original Word is very remarkable, (*in ἀντύπασι*) *enigmatically*. Future things are as yet concealed from us, wrapt up in Allegory, Riddle, or dark Ænigma; which gives us only a few indirect Hints or a mystical Representation of the thing intended,
by

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by which we are left to guess it out. And hence it is that Multitudes form no Notion at all concerning the Objects of abstract Science, whilst some are very dubious in the right, and others very confident in the wrong.

And not only matters of abstruse Speculation, but the plainest things in Religion are by many but uncertainly understood. Not that the things themselves are uncertain, but it is uncertain whether the Persons that boast the greatest Knowledge of them do form a Conception of them that is certainly right: especially considering the Medium they look through; that is, the Lusts, Passions and Prejudices with which they are beset. And it is not certain but much of that exalted Knowledge which some greatly value themselves upon the acquisition of as much superior to the common Level, may appear, when all this surrounding Darkness is removed, to be nothing but downright Ignorance; and they themselves may be pretty much in the Situation of a Person wandering in the Wilderness by night, who finds when the Sun rises, that he has rambled in a wrong way just so much more

our present Knowledge.

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more than others, as he imagined he had advanced before them in the right. SERM.
V.

Thus much, I think, the text warrants us to assert, which is a Caution to all, not to think of themselves and their Knowledge more highly than they ought to think, but to think soberly; lest after all their fancied superiority in Knowledge, they be found at last to know nothing yet as they ought to know.

~ Lastly, The last View which the Apostle gives us of the deficiency of human Knowledge in the present State is, by comparing it with that of *Children* or *Infants*.

This we have in the verse immediately preceding the Text. *When I was a Child* (says he) *I spake as a Child, I understood as a Child, I thought (or reasoned) as a Child; but when I became a Man, I put away childish things.*

We are as yet in our Non-age, and but Children in Understanding. Children, you know, through the Immaturity of their Faculties, the liveliness of their Fancy, the strength of their Passions, and inexperience of their Age, are very liable to be mistaken; to take up with the first Notions that are instilled without Examination, to retain the first

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first Impressions that are made whether right or wrong, to be fond of the little Knowledge they have, to be confident in it, and to despise others for the want of it; whilst Persons of greater Sense, Experience, and Understanding, see that all their Confidence is owing to their Ignorance, and look upon them with pity.—But not with half so much pity as we shall look upon ourselves hereafter, when emerged out of this Obscurity in which we dwell, we look back from that Region of Light upon this Land of Darkness, and consider all our former Ignorance, Errors, false Judgment, Confidence and Prejudices, when we were but Children in Knowledge; when we *saw through a Glass darkly*, and knew but *in part*, and spake and reasoned and thought as *mere Infants in Understanding*.

These are the Views in which the Apostle represents our present defective Knowledge. Upon which I shall only make one short Remark, and then proceed. And it is this; All this the Apostle affirms concerning his own Knowledge, and that of the *Corinthian* Christians, who we find in the preceding Chapter, were endowed by the holy Ghost with

with a great variety of extraordinary Gifts, which were peculiar to that Age; How much more truly then may all this be affirmed of our Knowledge, who have all their natural Passions, Prejudices and Difficulties without their supernatural Advantages!

But I now proceed

II. To shew what kind of Knowledge the Apostle is here speaking of.

For certain it is, that Mankind are not in every thing so deplorably ignorant as he here represents them. Some things they do understand very well; have a better Knowledge of them than they need; and indeed than they ought to have. For it is really not worth while to be at much pains to acquire that Knowledge which will do us no good.

But the Knowledge which the Apostle here speaks of is moral or religious Knowledge: that Knowledge which is the proper Ornament and Entertainment of a rational Nature, and will contribute to it's Felicity and Perfection in it's better State; that Knowledge which is substantial and durable, and worthy our immortal Souls; is the
source

SERM.

V.

source of our purest and sublimest Pleasures whilst we are in this World, and will be much more so when we are gone out of it. For that Knowledge which perishes with us at Death is too low to be the chief Pursuit of an immortal Mind. Rather let us study those things which it will do us good to know after Death, and which we shall with pleasure contemplate a thousand ages hence.

And the principal Objects of this Knowledge are God, and Ourselves, Religion, the works of Nature, and the ways of Providence, These are the things the Knowledge of which will furnish immortal Entertainment to our intellectual Natures, and of which we can have at present but a very low and limited measure.

1. How partial, indistinct, uncertain, and low, is our Knowledge of the ever *Blessed* God!

That great, adorable, self-existent Power, who gave being to the Universe, who is essentially present in all Parts of it, and the original Source of all that is good, excellent or beautiful in it! Who made us, to make us happy; and who is leading us to Happiness by Methods which his unerring Wisdom

our present Knowledge.

III

SERM.

V.

dom sees to be most fit and conducive there unto, however inexpedient they now appear to our partial and contracted View! That great, first, eternal Cause of all Existence and Excellence, to contemplate whose Beauties and Glories will be the everlasting Joy of all intelligent happy Beings.—Oh! how little do we know of HIM! We diminish his divine Dignities in all our Thoughts: We depreciate his Excellencies in our most elevated Conceptions: when we put our Mind to the utmost stretch to form the sublimest Ideas of his eternal Glories, how soon do we find it overwhelmed with the weight of so astonishing a Subject! For, Ah! how can Immensity be confined in a Hand's-breadth! Here all finite Faculties are intirely swallowed up, like a Drop in the Ocean: and we are lost in Astonishment at the Poverty of our Powers.

Let the most comprehensive Mind but turn it's thoughts to Deity, and it is immediately confounded with it's own Ignorance. Here we know *but in* a very little *Part* indeed, see through a very defective *Glass* and cloudy Medium, and are less than *Babes*, mere Reptiles, *in Understanding*.

But

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V.

But this thick Darkness shall in part be removed. When shall it once be! 'O, thou great, all-perfect Source of Light and Good, when wilt thou disperse our Darkness, and satisfy this impatient Ardour of our Souls to know thee better?'

2. It is but very little we know of *Ourselves*.

Though the most intimate Object of the most interesting Knowledge. We know not the Wonders either of our external or internal Frame; the Faculties of our Nature; our Capacities for Service and Happiness; the Motives and Springs of our Conduct; the Passions that govern us; the Conduct and improvement of our superior Powers; the Influences to which they are liable, the Purposes to which they are to be directed, and the Manner in which they are to be employed in order to our Happiness and Usefulness, for which Ends we received them. And which is worse, we do not so much as know either our Ignorance or Knowledge; we shut our Eyes upon the former, and wonderfully admire the latter, though it be, perhaps, but little better.

How little are we acquainted with our own Powers? Let us take (for Instance)

the

the distinguishing Faculty of our Nature, *Reason*; we scarce know either how to judge of it, or how to improve it. How vainly do some exult in the Advantage of that little spark of Light, which the benign Author of our Being hath planted in us! as if by the sole Help of *that* they could see every thing as clearly as by the noon-day Sun! whilst others as much diminish the Use and despise the Guidance of it, or substitute Imagination in it's room, and mistake the wandering Light of *Fancy* for the steady Ray of *Reason*.

And if we are so ignorant of ourselves, and of what is within us, we cannot be supposed to be better acquainted with what is without us. And accordingly we find

3. That our Knowledge of *Divine* and *Religious things* in general is exceedingly defective.

It is sad to see what amazing Ignorance there is amongst a Multitude even of Protestant Christians about the great things of Religion; and that not only in the deep and disputable Mysteries of it, but in some of it's most plain and important Principles; nay, about the essential Nature and most

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substantial Truths of it; and even the plainest parts of practical Religion; and this not only amongst the lowest order of Men who have had no Advantages of Education, but among persons of a more elevated Rank, who have had sufficient Opportunities of being better instructed; but having *no Heart to improve the Prize put into their Hands*, are apt to despise it as a very unnecessary part of Learning; and neither value others the more for having it, nor themselves the less for wanting it.

Not to mention those who by a wrong turn in the Mind through the force of Bigotry, Enthusiasm, or Superstition, have amassed a heap of false, superfluous and unprofitable Knowledge; which they set a greater Value upon than some others do upon that which is most true, genuine and useful. So Children who are rich in Counters, which they cheaply come by, despise others who take more pains (as they imagine) for less Money.

Our Knowledge indeed is not always to be estimated by the pains we take to come at it (for many labour much about Trifles) but

but surely that which costs us nothing can be worth but little. SERM.
V.

4. How little do we know of the *Works* of God!

Our Understanding (as I before observed) is non-plus'd by every Atom we see: the least Grain of Sand transcends the Reach of all our Philosophy. Mankind, after having inhabited this Globe for near six thousand Years, have made shift at last in these latter Ages, by the help of a few Minds of uncommon Sagacity, to adjust the Laws and settle the Order and Revolutions of some of those heavenly Bodies which have been so long rolling before their Eyes; and to frame plausible *Hypotheses* concerning those *Phænomena* of which they cannot as yet attain to any certain Knowledge: and indeed have dived deeper into the Mysteries of Nature than any one preceding Age of the World ever did. But then the further they go in this Tract of philosophical enquiry, the more Wonders they descry; instead of coming to an end, the Prospect widens to their View; and all that they know is nothing in comparison of that which they are forced to confess their Ignorance of.

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How manifold and unsearchable are thy Works, almighty God of Nature! *in Wisdom hast thou made them all!*

Lastly. How much more inscrutable are the Ways of *Providence!*

The moral world is as full of Mysteries as the natural world is of Wonders. Yet all these Mysteries and Wonders lie in the plainest Light and the most beautiful Order before the divine eye, however dark or unequal they may appear to ours; who can no more take in the Wisdom, Depth, Grandeur and Order of them, than an Insect creeping on the wall of a royal Palace, can comprehend either the Beauty of the Edifice without, or the Counsels of State that are concerting within.

If we turn but our eyes to the Government of this lower World, we are soon lost in the Mazes of infinite Wisdom; and can never in the least conceive how good can arise from so much visible evil, Order out of so much Confusion, and Beauty out of so much Deformity. And yet that all things under the Government of God are well and wisely managed, we cannot doubt. But if we turn our Thoughts to other
Worlds

our present Knowledge.

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Worlds and other Species of created Beings (of which without doubt there are innumerable) all under the wise Care and Government of the same almighty and universal Monarch who is the daily object of our Adoration, how do we blush and mourn under our present Ignorance; and look upon ourselves and all our Knowledge comparatively, *as nothing, and less than nothing and Vanity!*

O, when shall we emerge out of all this Darknefs! How do our benighted Souls long for Light!

Great reason then had the Apostle to say, that at present *we understand but as children, we know but in part, and see but through a glass darkly.*

III. Let us now consider whence it is that all our best Attainments in Knowledge are at present so very poor and defective.

And upon a very little Recollection the reasons of this will appear obvious enough. For.

I. Our mental Powers themselves are at present but very feeble and defective.



The Imperfection of

Mankind in this world are but in the Infancy of their Being, in their first stage of Existence, and consequently their faculties (like those of Children) as yet but weak and tender. In the Beginning of Life the Mind is not able to form sublime Views, or bear the Fatigue of close Thought and intense Contemplation; but it gradually expands, the faculties by Exercise gather new Strength and Vigour, till the Infirmities of the Body and the Decays of Nature again enfeeble them, and reduce them to their first infantile Weakness. But whilst we are in this World the most improved state of our Faculties is but the Infancy of them: the future state is properly their state of Maturity; when they will be wonderfully strengthened and enlarged to a degree far beyond what they now are, never to decay or fail us more. And this Consideration alone must be supposed to make an unknown difference between our present and future Degrees of Knowledge. Besides

2. The Powers of the human Mind at present are not only weak, but miserably confined and cramped in their Operations by

by the Union of the Soul with a crazy and corruptible Body. SERM,
V.

In which it is not only imprisoned, but chained down and fettered by bodily Appetites. Whilst it is obliged to animate a Load of Flesh which it drags about it as a Clog; in vain does it strive to mount on the Wings of Contemplation and Faith. It is still pinioned down to Earth, tyed fast to a heavy lump of Matter, which impedes and checks all it's most vigorous Efforts upwards and forwards. Besides

3. Our Sphere of Knowledge is here very much contracted.

Alas! what Knowledge of the World or Men can be expected from one who hath lived all his Life in a Dungeon?

It is but a few things we can view through the narrow Windows of our Prison. But, O! what a World of new, unseen, unthought of objects of Delight and Wonder will present themselves to the enlarged Soul the very Moment it is set at Liberty. Add to this

4. That under all these Disadvantages, the time that is here allowed us for attaining Knowledge is very short.

All the prime part of Life is usually spent in trifling Amusements or following the Impulse of Sense and Appetite; or at best, only in preparatory Studies, or lying in Materials for useful Knowledge to be applied and used hereafter. Or, to change the Simile, we spend the first and best part of our time (and we necessarily must) in laying the Foundation for the Fabrick, which before it be half raised, perhaps, is suddenly overturned by the Hand of Death.

And here I only speak of those whose whole Lives are devoted to a search of Knowledge; which is not the case, I believe, of one in a thousand; all the rest being well content with their native Ignorance of, or a superficial Acquaintance with, those things which it most of all concerns them to know. But were the whole term of human Life to be employed only in the Prosecution of true Knowledge, it is too short for us to make any considerable Proficiency therein. *We are but of yesterday, and know nothing.* Besides

5. How often are we diverted from this Pursuit?

How

our present Knowledge.

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How many Avocations do we meet with from the World and the Affairs of it? which necessarily claim a good part of our Attention and Care, and rob us of that time which might have been more usefully employed in augmenting the Furniture of the Mind.

Lastly, How often are we perplexed, entangled, and bewildered by our own Prejudices and those of others?

Whereby we are often turned aside from the right path of Wisdom, and put upon a wrong Scent. So that instead of making a Progress in the right way of Knowledge, we have enough to do to recover our Wanderings from it. And ~~it~~ is sometimes the main business of the latter part of Life to retract the Errors of the former.

And is it to be expected now, that Beings so weak, so embarrassed, so confined, so perplexed, so short-lived, so mutable, and so fallible, should make any considerable Improvements in Knowledge? The truth is (as one well observes) this is not a proper state for it, nor was it ever designed to be so; but rather for the acquiring and cultivating those Habits of Virtue and Goodness which

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which are necessary to fit us for that World of Light and Glory, where alone the Soul will be satisfied with Knowledge.

“To what end now (perhaps you will be apt to say) have you given us this very diminutive view of human Knowledge.”

I answer

1. To excite our most ardent Desires after that World of Light and Liberty where disincumbered from our present Embarrassments, we shall enjoy the Pleasures of pure and perfect Science.

Where all our Doubts and Darkness shall be dispersed; where we shall no longer see *through a glass, but face to face*; no longer *know in part, but know as we are known*.

2. To shew how very little reason the most understanding man on Earth has to be vain of his Knowledge.

But the most understanding Men are generally least liable to this Charge; because they see enough to humble them for their Ignorance. Pride is always a Sign of little Knowledge, or low Knowledge, or false Knowledge. And

3. That holy, humble upright Souls, who have had but few means and opportunities
of

our present Knowledge.

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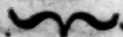
of attaining Knowledge, may not be too much discouraged under a Consciousness of their present Ignorance.

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True Knowledge (which is the proper Food and Entertainment of a reasonable Soul) to be sure, is one of the most desirable Acquisitions in the World. But however ardently the Soul may crave after it, those cravings cannot be perfectly satisfied here. But they shall hereafter. And however poor and defective be your present intellectual Attainments, yet if your Knowledge be of the right kind, if you know God and Christ and yourselves and divine things, though in a very low degree, and fetch your Knowledge of these things only from the Word of God and the nature of things, and endeavour to reduce this little Knowledge you have into Practice, depend upon it you *have chosen a good part*; are much wiser in the esteem of God and all good men, and will be infinitely more happy in the end, than the most prosperous wicked man in the World, however exalted above you in Understanding and Station. Nor do the wisest men on Earth exceed *you* so much in Knowledge now, as you will *them*,

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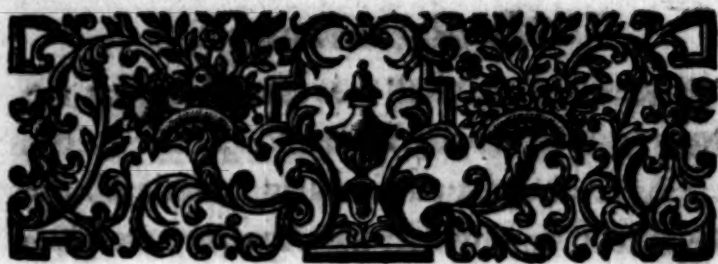


them, as soon as your pious Soul is set at Liberty from it's dark Prison the Body; when your present partial Knowledge shall be done away, and you shall see face to face, and know as you are known.

But the further Contemplation of the heavenly state under this particular Notion of it, as a state of unclouded Light and perfect Knowledge, which these words in the text imply, I must reserve for the Subject of the ensuing Discourse.



S E R-



S E R M O N VI.

The PERFECTION of our future
KNOWLEDGE.

I CORINTH. xiii. 12.

*For now we see through a Glass
darkly, but then face to face: Now
I know in part, but then shall I
know even as also I am known.*

IN these Words the Apostle is
comparing our present with our
future Knowledge. The for-
mer he speaks of in the most
diminishing, the latter in the most exalted
Terms. At present we see but *through a
Glass darkly*, and *know but in part*: But
ere long this glass shall be taken away,
and we shall *see face to face*; and our par-
tial

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tial Knowledge shall be complete, for we shall *know as we are known.*

I have already particularly considered the Representation which the Apostle here gives us of our present partial Knowledge; and and shall address myself now immediately to open to you the more comfortable prospect which he here exhibits to us of the future state and capacity of our Understanding under those Expressions, I shall *see face to face, and know even as also I am known.*

And in speaking to this part of the Subject, I shall observe the same Method I did in treating the other part of it, that is to say

- I. I shall consider the Properties of our future Knowledge implied in the expressions by which it is here described.
- II. What will be the Objects of it.
- III. What just and solid reasons we have to believe that our future Knowledge will be so complete and satisfying.
- Lastly,* I shall endeavour to make a suitable Application of the Subject.

I. I am to consider the Properties of our future Knowledge implied in the expressions by which it is here described.

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And in order to this we must carefully attend to the meaning and full import of those Expressions themselves. Therefore

1. The Apostle says that we shall hereafter see *face to face*.

This stands in opposition to our present sight of things, which is only *through a glass darkly*; and therefore implies near, distinct Vision.

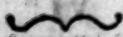
The distant Objects of which we have now but a very imperfect sight, will be brought near to our Face, and held up close to our Eyes; by which means we shall have a much more clear distinct, and certain view of them than we could ever have before by the help of a Glass.

That Glass is Reason assisted by Faith. But it will hereafter be taken away; because our Reason (which is often but conjectural) will be turned into Certainty, and our Faith into Vision.

2. He further adds——*but then shall I know even as I am known.*

The compound Word in the original (a) is more emphatical than the simple Verb; which

(a) Ἐπιγινώσκω.



which our *English* Translators have taken no notice of. It signifies, then shall I *clearly* or *distinctly know* even as I am *clearly* or *distinctly known*. That is, then shall I know divine and heavenly things, and God himself, even as I am known of him, that is not with the same degree of Perfection, but with the same degree of Certainty and Satisfaction. As if he had said — “ My Knowledge will then be no longer partial “ as it is now, but complete ; and perfect “ in it’s kind, though not in degree ; because it will be still progressive.”

Hence then the following Properties of our future Knowledge are evidently deduced.

1. It will be *distinct* and *clear* ; no longer confused and obscure as it now is while we look through a *Glass*.

2. It will be *certain* and *satisfying* ; no longer conjectural and enigmatical as it now is while we look through a *Glass darkly*.

3. It will be *perfect* and *complete* in it’s kind ; and no longer defective as it now is whilst we know but *in part* ; for we shall then *know even as we are known*.

Let

Let us carry these several Properties of our future Knowledge in our minds, as we now proceed

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II. To consider some of the various Objects of it.

These I shall mention in the same order I did before. And

1. The most glorious and felicitating Object of our thus improved and enlightened Understanding will be the ever-blessed God himself.

That great, first, eternal Cause of all Being and Bliss, of whom our eager Minds would now fain conceive more distinctly, but whose ineffable Glories transcend our Thoughts, overwhelm our Understanding, and baffle all our finite Faculties. *Clouds and thick darkness are round about him. He maketh darkness his secret Place, and thick Clouds are his Pavilion, (b).*

But it will not be always so. We shall soon have a better Knowledge of God our Maker. That *thick Darkness* which now conceals his Essence will open, and unvail

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(b) Psal. xviii. 11,

to us such a measure of his Glory as our finite Powers can bear; and which will be further displayed to us as we are able to bear it; not in a sudden flash of Light to dazzle and confound us, but in those gradual openings of his Brightness which will continually entertain and ravish us. So that though our Conceptions of him will still be gradual, they will nevertheless be distinct and clear, satisfying and certain; which will give the Mind a perpetual and increasing Joy, and at once banish all that doubt and darkness which now gives it so much Pain. And a stronger Idea and Assurance of this we cannot have than that which is conveyed to us in the expression of the text, *then shall I know him even as I am known of him*. That is (as I before observed) not so fully and perfectly, but as clearly and distinctly according to the Degree of our Capacities.

And O! who would not dye to obtain such a satisfying Sight of the great Author of the Universe? This is sometimes called the *Beatific Vision*, and sometimes the *Immediate Presence of God*; in which consists all the Fulness of the heavenly Felicity.

It

our future Knowledge

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It is true, the great and blessed God, as a pure and perfect Spirit, can never be seen with bodily Eyes. But we must not think that the Soul is capable of no distinct and clear Perceptions but what it receives by means of bodily Organs. It has even now a Power of realizing and ascertaining, of contemplating and enjoying things that are not seen. And when our mental Powers shall be unconfined, enlarged and improved, as we are sure they will be in Heaven, (and we know not but there may be new Faculties superadded, suitable to the new Objects of Contemplation) we shall then as distinctly and clearly discern and contemplate spiritual and invifible Objects, as we now do material ones by an Eye of sense.

In short, our Knowledge will be Vision, clear, distinct Vision; and though not sensitive and corporeal Vision, yet as certain and as satisfying as that is.

And when our ruined Bodies are repaired and re-united to our Souls, even our corporeal Vision will be restored to contemplate those things which will be the proper Objects of it. And then shall we see *Face to Face* Him whom *having not seen we love,*

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the great Friend and Redeemer of our Souls; who honoured our Nature by assuming it; that he might restore and save it: see Him in all his divine and mediatorial Glory; and learn from him those Mysteries of his Incarnation and our Redemption, which are now too deep for Reason's line to fathom.

2. Then shall we begin to know *ourselves*.

For what ever it may be thought, Man is as yet one of the greatest Mysteries to himself; that is, a Subject about which he knows as little as almost any thing which falls within the Compass of his Understanding.

Then he will begin to think as an immortal Creature ought to do. Which he very rarely does now, whilst his Mind is sensualized, his Understanding cramped, his Sentiments debased, and his Heart captivated by low and earthly things. Then will he look up to his Original with perpetual Adoration and Joy, and live up to the Dignity of an intelligent and immortal Being, made for the Honour of his great Creator, in whose Praise and Service all his Powers

our future Knowledge.

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Powers will be for ever delightfully employed. He will be no longer ignorant of his own Capacities and Dispositions, his Nature or End. But whilst he surveys the Wonders of his Frame, the Powers of his Mind, and the various Composition of his Nature, as a material and immaterial Being united, the secret and amazing Laws of that Union, and the Accuracy and Perfection with which all is adjusted and adapted to the greatest and wisest Ends, how will he break out (upon such a just and general View of himself) into the most grateful Adoration of the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God, saying "How tremendous and wonderful is thy Workmanship, "O almighty Maker of my Frame!"

We shall then discover in ourselves such wonders of divine Wisdom and Goodness (and especially if we take into the View the Circumstances of our former State of Trial, and their Connexion with future things) as will always furnish out the most pleasing and surprizing Contemplations.----And we shall know the reason *then* that we know ourselves no better *now*.

3. Our

The Perfection of

3. Our sense of religious and divine things will then be strong, comprehensive, and clear.

Then only shall we begin to be infallible; and perhaps be ashamed of our former Ignorance when we thought our selves most so. Then shall we discern the wrong Paths in which we trod, as plainly as a benighted Traveller at the rising of the morning Sun; and be able, it may be, to trace our Errors up to their Original, the first wrong Impressions we received, which insensibly turned us aside from the path of Truth, which we were never able afterwards to recover: whilst at the same time we shall adore the Guard and Guidance of divine Grace, which preserved our feeble and fickle Minds from imbibing Errors of a more dangerous and pernicious Tendency.

Then, O, with what a Mixture of strong Compassion and Concern shall we view the uncharitable Animosities of our Fellow-Christians on Earth, (who are soon to be our Fellow-Saints in Heaven) about points of a dark and doubtful Nature, arguing, (like Children) as we once did, with much Confidence and little Knowledge, equally ignorant

our future Knowledge.

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ignorant, equally bold, and equally mistaken!

If we divide Religion into it's four Parts, *Moral, Positive, Speculative, and Devotional*, we shall then see all those Things which relate to each of them, stand in the clearest Light and Order, which appear to our present Understanding under much Confusion and Obscurity.

We shall then clearly see the Duties of Morality to be founded in the Relation we bear to God and our Fellow-Creatures; and consequently, that they are of perpetual and immutable Obligation, not only to us but to every intelligent Species of created Beings, how ever diversified in their Nature and Circumstances; and that it must necessarily be the Basis of all true Religion or of any divine Revelation, under what ever Mode or different characteristic Forms it may be instituted.

And as to the positive or ceremonial Parts of Religion, we shall then plainly discern the wise Ends intended thereby, and the Aptitude of such means to answer those wise Ends; both which are in a great Measure above our present Comprehension, especially



The Perfection of

with regard to the Ritual of the Jewish Dispensation.

And then all those points of dark Doctrine and Controversy about which we now contend with so much Warmth, will lie before our Minds in a clear and easy Light. And one Truth we shall then be undoubtedly convinced of, which we never could be whilst we inhabited Earth (*viz.*) that all the Truth did not lie on that side of the Question which we maintained, and that there was much Mistake and Error in those very Sentiments which we so zealously defended for great important Principles.

And as for devotional Religion, the Strength and Joy and Life of every pious Soul, in the warm and holy Exercises of which consists the greatest Part of the Heavenly Bliss, we shall then wonder we could ever be so cold and indifferent in those divine and heavenly Employments when on Earth, and shall be able to see what those things were which contributed so much to damp our Devotion, and clog our Souls in their most fervent Aspirations to God and Glory.

Thus

Thus every part of Religion will then appear to us in the most beautiful Consistency, all conspiring to the same great End, the Glory of God and the happiness of his Creatures.

4. Glorious and surprizing then will be the new discoveries we shall make in the Works of God.

The hidden Mysteries of Nature which now lie too deep for our Ken, and baffle all our most exquisite and laborious Research, will then lie open to our View. And we shall have an intuitive Knowledge of what it now costs us the Study of an Age to attain an imperfect Notice of.

And with what an unknown Delight and Astonishment will our Minds, with their improved and unobstructed Faculties, survey those numberless new and unseen Objects, of which in their former State of Confinement they never once formed the least Conception? what exquisite Beauties will then be presented to them, which were before altogether unimagined, and which we never apprehended to exist in the Works of God; and which will transport the Soul with a pleasure it never thought
itself

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itself capable of enjoying! When we behold Worlds beyond Worlds rising to our View in an endless Progression besides perhaps innumerable more buried in the immense Void, and therefore invisible; and all these replenished with various Species of intelligent Beings, paying their joint Homage to the one almighty and universal LORD, who is *our* Maker; and when we shall see (as we may justly suppose we shall) new Creations still rising out of nothing in the several parts of the Universe (for what Bounds can the Imagination set to unlimited Power?) and new Species of Creatures starting into Being at the almighty *Fiat*, to augment the Number and Happiness of them who continually praise and adore Him; I say, when our Souls are wrapt into these new Scenes of Contemplation and Wonder, with what a ravishment and joy of Heart (before unfelt) shall we assume the Psalmist's Exclamation, *How manifold are thy Works, O Jehovah, in wisdom hast thou made them all!*

Do not look upon this now as a mere exorbitant flight of Fancy, as little low Minds unaccustomed to free Thought and Contem-
 plation

plation are too apt to do. I shall presently prove it to be extremely probable (from the most, solid principles) that the unconfined Powers of our immortal Souls will make such new discoveries hereafter in the works of Nature ; and in the mean time shall only remind you that the sacred Scriptures themselves lay a just foundation for this Supposition by asserting——*that Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor have entered into the Heart of Man the things (or the future Entertainments) which God hath prepared for them that love him, (c) ; that it does not yet appear what we shall be, (d) ; and that the Apostle Paul who had a transient Glimpse of the heavenly Glory declares that he saw things it was not possible for him to utter, (e).* But

Lastly, What a sweet and sublime Entertainment will the enlarged Mind enjoy in contemplating the wise and wondrous Ways of Providence !

The other World will unravel the Intricacies and unvail the Darknefs that involve the Ways of Providence in this. Then the
Myste-

(c) 1 Cor. ii. 9. (d) 1 John. iii. 2. (e) 2 Cor. xii. 4.

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Mysteries of the divine Government which now appear to us so inexplicable will be in a great measure unfolded. Then shall we be thoroughly convinced (of what one would think we should readily enough believe now) that the only reason the providential Conduct appears to us so mysterious is, because *we know but in part*; can see but a little, a very little way into the Designs of divine Wisdom; and that the Thoughts and Ways of God are not as ours, but infinitely above them.

Besides, our Judgment at present is not only extremely weak, but too precipitant. Why should we judge of the whole *Drama* by the first Act? Let us wait to the last concluding Scene, and we shall judge better. O, how shall we be astonished then to see (with relation to our own private Interest) as good old *Jacob* did upon Recollection, that all those things were *for us* which we once imagined were quite *against us*; and the Events which seemed to concur to load us with Evil were all the while (according to the divine Promise) *working together for our Good*! Under all the most dark and discouraging

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couraging Scenes of divine Providence then let us conceive the all-wise Disposer of things to say to us, what *Christ* in another case said to *Simon Peter*, *what I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*

But that I may not be thought to assert too much concerning the Nature and Extent of our future Knowledge, I shall now

III. Shew you what just and solid Reasons we have to believe that our Knowledge hereafter will be so complete and satisfying.

I. Because we are sure that in Heaven there will be nothing wanting to perfect the Happiness of a glorified Spirit.

But the human Soul, which hath a natural Appetite for Knowledge, would find a great Deficiency in it's Felicity, if it were not furnish'd with Knowledge in proportion to it's Cravings after it, and it's Capacity to receive it. Without this it's future Happiness would be very incomplete; because the Perfection of it's Happiness then will consist in the perfect employment of it's Powers

SERM. Powers, and the perfect gratification of it's
VI. Desires. But

2. It's Powers, Capacities, and Desires will be then inconceivably enlarged and opened, and consequently the Objects and Extent of it's Knowledge must be proportionably increased.

So that there is no danger that the Imagination should enlarge the Sphere of it too much. For after all that hath been said, our clear and extensive Views in that Land of Light, (when Knowledge will pour with full Tides into our Minds) will transcend every thing that the most sanguine Imagination can conceive of it at present. Here then we may give it full Scope without danger of Excess or Mistake; provided that the Knowledge we suppose the Soul shall then have, be suitable to it's Nature and certainly conducive to it's Felicity.

But that I may further vindicate such Contemplations from all imputation of Extravagance, and shew you that they are built upon the most solid and rational Principles, let us briefly attend to the following Observations.

1. Let

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1. Let us remember that all the natural Powers and Faculties of the Mind will then be in their *full Strength* and Maturity.

All faithful, vigorous, and lively, beyond what we can conceive them to be in their present state of Imbecility and Decay. The Image which the Apostle presents us with in the verse before the text is a very lively one. How weak are the Faculties of a new-born Infant! how low, and few, and imperfect it's Ideas! and how vastly different from those of a wise, experienced and learned Man, in the full Vigour and Improvement of all his Powers! Such and much greater will be the difference between our present and our future Knowledge; when the Strength and Vigour of our mental Powers will much more exceed what they now are, than the Capacities of a Man do those of Infant Age. And a Child can no more imagine the Extent of a Man's Understanding, than we can that which will hereafter be ours. Besides

2. Our Sphere of Knowledge will then be vastly *enlarged*.

New and unthought of Scenes of Contemplation will arise to our view as soon as

our



our Souls are set at large from their Prison of Flesh. And a Man who hath spent all his Life in a Dungeon, and is suddenly brought out and placed in the midst of a great and populous City, will not be so much surprized at all the strange and unheard-of Objects he surveys, as the human Soul will be, when released from the Body and conducted to the *new Jerusalem*, the City of the heavenly King.

3. The enlarged Powers of our Mind will then be free from all their *present Incumbrances*.

The Body will no longer hang as a dead Weight on the Soul to check it's eager Sallies and Operations, as we too often find it does now. So that it will exert all it's unembaras'd Faculties with a Life, Facility, and Freedom it never felt before.

4. We shall have no *wrong Prejudices* and Prepossessions to overcome or guard against, by which our free Progress in true Knowledge is now so much obstructed.

Because we shall then be out of all danger of forming a wrong Judgment; for our Knowledge will be no less certain than comprehensive.

5. We

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5. We shall then meet with no more *Avocations* to divert us from the Pursuit of Knowledge.

But this will be our constant, uniform and uninterrupted Pleasure and Employment. And what a mighty Progress must we be supposed to make in the *way of Understanding*, when the Capacities and Powers of the Soul, thus strengthened, free and unconfined, shall meet with no Errors to draw them back, no Impediments to obstruct them in, and no *Avocations* to divert them from it! Especially if we add

6. That this speedy Progress in Knowledge we shall make, not only a few Years but to all Eternity.

For new Improvements in Knowledge will for ever be the Desire and Entertainment of all created intelligent Beings in the heavenly State: This will always be their proper Happiness; but as their Happiness will be Everlasting, their Improvements in Knowledge must of consequence be so too. And add to all, that their Progress in Knowledge will be continually increasing, in proportion to the Degree in which their Capacities to receive it will be continually

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enlarging;

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enlarging; and this to ALL ETERNITY! O, how transporting the Thought! with what a vast immense Ambition does it inspire our expecting Souls, already ravished with the View!

And now say, whether the short Representation I gave you of the amazing Extent and Objects of our future Knowledge can be called Imaginary and Groundless; when the Intellectual Powers will be so strong and large, so free and unconfined, so eagerly reaching after and so capable of making still further and quicker advancements in Knowledge, without Intermission or End; and whether the glorious Prospects with which we shall hereafter be entertained will not open to the Intellectual View in proportion to it's power of taking them in.

I have now laid before you those thoughts which I conceived proper to be suggested upon this Subject. What remains is the Application of it. And

i. Upon such a prospect of our future Knowledge I believe we shall all of us be disposed to lament our present Ignorance.

And such a Contemplation as that which we have now been engaged in, is the fittest
Expedient

our future Knowledge.

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Expedient in the World to kill all the Seeds of Vanity arising from a conceit of our present Intellectual Improvements.

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Indeed one would be ready to think at first Sight, that if there be any thing of which a man might with the least Colour of reason be vain, it is his superiour Attainments in right Knowledge; because this is one of the noblest Objects of Pursuit, and the Acquisition of it must cost him much Pains: whereas Honour, Power, Health, Birth, Beauty, and the common external Advantages of Life, are all the free Gifts of Providence. But if we consider the matter thoroughly, there is scarce any thing we have less reason to be vain of than our Knowledge. For the Abilities and Opportunities of thus furnishing and improving our minds are as much the free Gifts of Providence as any other Advantages which distinguish Mankind; and after all, our Abilities and Opportunities have been so much neglected, our Stock of true Knowledge is so poor, our Errors so many, our Prejudices so strong, our Powers so weak, and false Knowledge so often substituted in the room of true, that upon a proper Survey of our

SERM. present mental Improvements (especially
 VI. when compared with our future Prospects)
 it may with much reason excite our Self-
 abasement and Humility than our Self-ap-
 plause and Vanity. For surely we must
 now begin to see that as yet we are but
Children in Understanding, Babes in Know-
ledge, that we know but in part, see through
a Glass darkly, and are but of yesterday and
know nothing.

2. Let us however be thankful for the
 Light we have.

Imperfect as it is, it is much greater than
 perhaps nine parts in ten of all the human
 Race enjoy. We cannot be thankful
 enough, that we are not involved in that
 deplorable Darkness which still covers the
 Pagan, the Jewish, the Mahometan, and
 Antichristian World; that we have been
 educated in Protestant Principles, been di-
 rected in the Way, and instructed in the
Words of Eternal Life; and that the graci-
 ous method by which God is recovering
 an apostate World unto himself and Hap-
 piness is so plainly revealed to us in the
 Gospel of *Jesus Christ* his Son. Have we
 not abundant reason to be thankful who
 have

have been so highly favoured? and especially for those enlivening Prospects of Light and Glory which his Gospel presents us with, and of those endless Improvements of our Understanding and Felicity which we have now been entertaining our minds with the Views of.

3. If we would shew ourselves thankful for the Light we have, let us improve it.

We are Creatures entered into a State of Existence which though continually changing will never end. Our great Concern is, that it be continually changing for the better; and that we do not mistake the Views and Motives that govern us. We find in our minds a natural Thirst after new Knowledge; the Increase of which always gives us a Satisfaction and Pleasure in proportion to it's supposed degree of Certainty and Importance. As this strong desire of the Soul after intellectual Improvements is natural to it and the Spring of so much Delight, we are sure it will never end. Now therefore let us enter upon that Pursuit of true Science which will be eternally progressive, and furnish out everlasting Entertainments to us in the other World. Herein the following

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Cautions will be extremely necessary for our Direction; with the mention of which I shall conclude.

1. Let us take care we do not depreciate the most excellent Knowledge, nor over-value that which is of little Worth. Both which we are too apt to do. Knowledge is a means, and must always be estimated (as other means are) by it's End; viz. our Usefulness and Happiness. That Knowledge which tends to make us most useful here, and most happy hereafter, is the best Knowledge. That which tends neither to our Usefulness nor Happiness is unworthy our Pursuit.

2. Let us see to it that we do not substitute false Knowledge for true. We see this very common in human Life; against which the Word of God frequently puts us upon our Guard. In this dark World how often does Error pass for Truth, and Ignorance for Understanding! *If the Light within you be Darkness (saith our Saviour) how great is that Darkness!*

3. Covet not so much extensive as solid Understanding. By grasping at too much we sometimes lose all. Our Intellectual
Rooms

our future Knowledge.

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Rooms are as yet but small; let us store them with a little useful Furniture, rather than a heap of Lumber. Examine well the Path you are in, to be assured that it is right, and a little Progress therein will give you more Comfort than greater speed in a doubtful way. In a Word, let the most important Truths engage your chief Attention, however plain and common they may be.

4. The best way to improve in true Knowledge is to practise it. Because this will not only help us to retain the right Knowledge we have, but will keep the Powers properly employed for the reception of more. A little right Knowledge well digested and well directed makes a wiser man than a great deal misapplied.

5. Let us frequently address our most ardent Thoughts and Prayers to the Fountain of everlasting Light, to disperse our Darkness, to enlighten our Hearts, to teach us his Will, and conduct us *in the way of Understanding. In his Light we shall see Light.* As the Sun gives us Light to see itself and all the Beauties of Nature that surround us, which without it would be

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inwrap'd in Darkness; " Thus, O Father
 " and Fountain of everlasting Light, do thou
 " shine upon our minds; that by thy reflect-
 " ed Ray we may penetrate the thick
 " Darkness which now involves us, and
 " see things in their true Light; be thou
 " our constant Guide through this dark
 " World, to those Realms of Bliss and
 " Brightness, where we shall no longer (as
 " now) *see through a Glass darkly, and know
 " but in part, but shall see Face to Face
 " and know even as also we are known.*"



SERMON VII.



S E R M O N VII.

The CHRISTIAN'S LIFE a hidden
LIFE.

COLOS. iii. 3.

*For ye are dead, and your Life is
hid with Christ in God.*

THE Particle [for] shews that these words were spoken and urged by the Apostle, as an Argument to enforce the Advice he had given the Christians at *Coloss* in the preceeding verse. *Set your Affection* (saith he) *on things above, not on things on the Earth; For ye are dead, and your Life is*
hid

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hid with Christ in God. THEREFORE set your Affection on things above; and THEREFORE (as it follows ver. 5.) mortify your Members which are upon the Earth. Whence by the way we may observe two things.

1. That the best way to have our Affections fixed upon things above, is to be more mortified to the things of the Earth. For thus much the Connexion implies. And

2. That there cannot be a more proper Motive to excite us to both these than this Consideration; viz. that as Christians, we are dead to Sin and the World, profess a spiritual and divine Life, and through Jesus Christ hope for eternal Life. For this you see is the force of the Apostle's reasoning, and thus the Argument stands. *Set your Affection on things above, and not on things on the Earth; for ye are dead, and your Life is hid with Christ in God: Mortify therefore your Members which are upon the Earth.*

The words of the Text describe the proper Character of all real Christians. *They are dead, and their Life is hid with Christ in God.* They contain a remarkable *Antithesis*, or opposition of Terms, and a kind of ambiguous or mystical Description of a true Christian's

Christian's State and Character; but when rightly explained and duly considered, they have a very important meaning and convey very useful Instruction.

The true Christian (the Apostle saith) is in one sense *dead*, and yet in another sense he is *alive*; but though he is alive he lives a *hidden Life*, and *his Life is hid with Christ in God*.—— I shall endeavour to open explain, and improve every Branch of this Description particularly.

I. Then let us consider in what sense a true Christian may be said to be *dead*.

By this now the Apostle must certainly mean either that he is dead to Sin, or dead to the World; or else he might have a particular View to those constant and fatal Dangers and Sufferings to which the steady Profession of Christianity exposed it's first Advocates; whereby they might be said, according to the Apostle's Phrase, (a), *to die daily*, because they lived in continual Expectation of Death.

1. A true Christian is dead to Sin.

When he is enabled by divine Grace to mortify the Deeds of the Flesh, so that Sin hath

(a) 1 Cor. xv. 31.

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hath lost it's Reign and Tyranny in the Soul, then is he in Scripture Language said to be *dead to Sin*. *How shall we* (saith the Apostle) *who are dead to Sin live any longer therein?* Rom. vi. 2. This is explained in the seventh verse, *he that is dead is freed from Sin*. That is, freed from it's Dominion and Government. So again in verse the eleventh of the same Chapter, *likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto Sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

As they who continue under the Captivity and Bondage of Sin are said to be dead *in Sin*, so they who by the Grace of God are set free from that miserable State of Servitude are, by the like figure, said to be dead *to Sin*.

But it is worth observing, that as, on the one hand, they who are said to be dead *in Sin* are not to be supposed altogether as incapable of doing any thing towards their recovery to a spiritual Life as a dead Man is of doing any thing towards the recovery of a natural Life; so on the other hand, they who are said to be dead *to Sin* are not to be thought as incapable of sinning as a dead Man is of acting. They are both figurative

figurative Expressions; and we must take care not to torture and strain up the Figures and Metaphors of Scripture too high; but to find out and fix our Eye upon the general sense intended by them; which here is no more than this, *viz.* that, in the one Case, a Man is so far under the power and dominion of Sin that till a change be wrought in his Heart he cannot live without the habitual Practice of it; and, in the other case, he is by the Grace of God so far delivered from the Power, and convinced of the Evil of it, that he dares not and cannot live in the allowed Commiſſion of it. And hence in the figurative Stile of Scripture, one is said to be spiritually dead, and the other spiritually alive; or the one dead in Sin, the other dead to Sin. Which makes the Phrase sufficiently plain; especially if we add, that they who are dead in Sin are in the way to eternal Death, and they who are dead to Sin are delivered from it.

So much for the first sense of the Words; all that are Christians indeed are *dead to Sin*.

2. They are dead to the World.

Not that they want the common Appetites and Desires of human Nature; for they have

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have as quick a relish of the Delights and Satisfactions of Life as others have ; nor that they are insensible to natural Evils, which they feel and fear as well as other Men : for natural Affections are the same, and work the same way in all Men. They pretend not to a *Stoical* Insensibility, which was rather a brutal Hardiness or an unnatural obstinacy than a Philosophical Firmness. For I have no notion of that Philosophy which forbids the feelings of Humanity. Neither Philosophy nor Religion were ever designed to eradicate, they only regulate, the principles and passions of the human Nature ; * and deny us no delights in this Life but those which are inconsistent with our Enjoyment of much greater in the other ; and require no instances of Mortification and Self-denial but what are necessary to our Peace here and Happiness hereafter. It reflects great Dishonour on the Goodness of

* And therefore the Institution of Monachism (which was introduced in the fifth Century) the unnatural Austerities of a recluse Life, and the cruel Severities which Hermits exercised upon themselves, under a shew of being mortified to the Flesh and the World, were all founded on a Mistake, and proceeded from an Ignorance of the true Nature and Obligations of Religion.

of God and the Excellency of Religion to suppose that a Man must of necessity make himself miserable here in order to be happy hereafter. Where as the truth is, that Religion generally secures to us the truest Happiness in this World as well as in that to come.

But when I say a Christian is *dead to the World*; I only mean, he is no longer under the *Government of worldly Affections*. Though he cannot but desire the good things of this Life, yet he does not seek them as his chief Good; does not pursue them as his Happiness, dares not sacrifice his Conscience to them. Whilst others break down all the Fences of Honour, Honesty, Conscience, Reason and Religion to come at them, he had much rather be without them than violate any of those sacred Obligations to attain them. In a word, he hath better things in Prospect, and therefore none of these things greatly *move him*, so he may but *finish his Course with Joy*, and attain that higher Happiness he hath in view. He seeks, possesses and enjoys these things with an Indifference becoming his Hopes of better; and takes care to hold them

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them no faster than is consistent with his Peace in parting with them.

And as to the Sorrows and Evils of Life, he is in like manner dead to them; that is, he is raised much above them. He knows it is no more possible for the Troubles of this Life to make him miserable than for the Comforts of it to make him happy. In short, the Christian looks upon the World neither as his best Friend nor worst Enemy; and therefore has not those mighty Expectations from it's Smiles which some have, nor that dread of it's Frowns which others have. And thus the *World is crucified to him and he to the World, (b)*. All it's sinful Pleasures he at once renounces, it's lawful Pleasures he with Caution and Discretion uses, and the Calamities of it he does not anxiously dread. And thus may he be said to be *dead* to it. Because all those irregular Appetites which are generally called *worldly Affections* are mortified in him.

3. There is another sense in which the Christians to whom the Apostle wrote might be said to be dead, *viz.* in regard to those

(b) Gal. vi. 14.

fatal Dangers and Sufferings to which their profession of Christianity exposed them; whereby they were said to *die daily*, as living in continual Expectation of Death.

This is the meaning of those words of the Apostle, *1 Cor. xv. 31. I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus that I die daily.* By which he means his being continually exposed to death; as appears from the preceding and following verses; where he speaks of fighting with Beasts at *Ephesus*, and being *in jeopardy every hour.*

So much may suffice to explain the first part of the Description the Apostle gives us of the true Christian's character. He is *dead*; dead to Sin, dead to the World, and lives in continual expectation of Death; for so we ought to do whether the immediate Perils to which we are exposed be greater or less.

II. The other part of his Character is set in a surprising *Antithesis* or opposition to this; *viz.* that notwithstanding all this, he is alive; for *his Life is hid with Christ in God.*

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This must undoubtedly be meant of a Spiritual Life. And as this expression stands in opposition to the other, we may soon come to the true meaning of it. He is alive to God, has a lively Sense of spiritual things and lives in the pleasing Hope and Expectation of eternal Life.

1. He is alive to God.

I chuse to express it so, because it is the Apostle's own Phrase, when he uses the same contrast or opposition of terms in another place, *Rom. vi. 11. Reckon ye also yourselves dead unto Sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* That is, he hath lively Affections towards God, a lively Disposition to all the duties of Piety, quickened hereunto by a Principle of divine Life. And therefore what the Apostle *Paul* calls being *alive unto God*, the Apostle *Peter* calls *living unto Righteousness*. Both signifying the same thing, because they are both opposed to the same thing, *viz.* being dead unto Sin. See *1 Pet. ii. 24.*

2. He has a lively sense of spiritual things.

He hath a quick and delightful Relish of those things which to wicked Men are insipid

insipid or disgustful; sees a Beauty, and tastes a Sweetness in those things which to carnal minds are deformed and disagreeable.

The exercises of Religion and Devotion are his most desired Entertainments, and to take care of his Soul and his immortal Interest, is his chief employment. Whilst others are anxiously crying out, *who will shew us any Earthly Good?* the inward desire of his Soul is, *Lord lift thou upon me the Light of thy Countenance.*

3. He lives in a pleasing Expectation of eternal Life.

If he dies daily by continually expecting his departure out of this World, he daily lives in the joyful hope of a better. That hope is the Life of his Soul, and when well established will not leave him even in Death.

In these respects the Christian may be said to be spiritually alive; as he is alive to God, has a lively sense of spiritual things, and lives in hope of eternal Life.

III. Another part of the Christian's character mentioned in the Text is this,
his Life is hid.

A Christian's Life is mostly a hidden Life. It seems somewhat dubious, what that Life of a Christian is which the Apostle here calls a hidden Life; whether he means that *Spiritual* Life which he lives now, as appears probable by it's being opposed to a spiritual Death in the former part of the Words; or that *Eternal* Life he hopes for hereafter, which the latter part of the words seems rather to imply, where it is said that *his Life is hid with Christ in God*. But I see no reason, at least no necessity, to confine it to either of these exclusive of the other. But as the word will very naturally bear both Senses, and there is nothing in the Context to oppose either, I shall therefore consider it in both these views.

1. The Christian's Spiritual Life, whereby he lives to God, has a lively taste of Spiritual things, and is animated with the hopes of Heaven and Blessedness; this, I say, is for the most part a hidden Life; that is, hidden from the World.

It does not always appear very conspicuously to the view of others. The World may, and often does, mistake the true Character of sincere Christians; is not sensible

fible of their real worth. They are like unpolished Jewels, which for their rough and uncomely outside are despised by those to whom their intrinsick value is unknown, They who are precious in the sight of God may be the Refuse and Outcasts of a misjudging World; who have often been so far mistaken in their notions of good Men, as to persecute them for the worst; and to look upon *them* as not fit for their Company in this World, whom God thinks meet for his presence in Heaven. So that it does not appear to the World, that is, to the gross and bulk of Mankind, what they really are *now*, no more than what they shall be hereafter. In this sense the *Spiritual Life* may be said to be a *bidden Life*.

And several good reasons may be assigned for this, why the real Excellencies of good Men are often so far concealed from the Observation of the World; whence they who are worthy of the highest Esteem are often despised, or at least not so much esteemed in general as they ought to be. I shall just mention two or three.

1. This may arise in a good measure from the very nature of those Virtues and



Graces which compose the Christian Life; most of which delight in Solitude, and shun Popularity and Applause; or at least are not suited to attract them. Meekness, Humility, Faith, Moderation, Patience, Hope, Spirituality and Self-government (though they are the most substantial and valuable parts of the Christian's Character, yet) make no great Show in the Eye of the World, do not recommend a man to the Regard of the Vulgar, have nothing to excite the Admiration or Gaze of the Multitude; these are Beauties that lie too deep for their Ken; and therefore, though they are more worthy of Esteem than those things which men generally more admire, yet are often passed by unobserved or disregarded.

Besides, the truly good Man hath no Ambition at all to appear eminent in the Eyes of others. He seeks not the *Honour that cometh from Men*. The great thing he aims at is Integrity of Heart and Life, that he may appear honourable in the Eye of God. And he is not so much concerned to *appear* good, as to *be* so. Which is one chief

chief reason that his real worth is so often hid from Men.

2. Another may arise from the disadvantage and meaness of his external condition in the World. Few eminently good Men shine in high Life. If at any time they do, their religious Character then indeed appears to great Advantage. The dignity of their Station reflects an additional lustre on their Virtues and makes them shine at a distance; like the reflection of the Sun from the Top of a high Mountain, which is seen from far, whilst that at the bottom of it, (which may be altogether as bright) is taken notice of only by those that are near it. True Virtue and Goodness often lose their Honour in this World by being buried in Obscurity. And the lowness of a Christian's worldly Circumstances will render him despicable in the Eyes of Men, however honourable his Goodness may render him in the Eyes of God. Not to say, that Poverty, besides obscuring a great many Virtues which a good Man shews, makes him incapable at the same time of exerting a great many others which would signally distinguish him, were he not deprived of an opportunity of displaying

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ing them to the World. Hence it is that some of the greatest Excellencies of a good Man at present lie altogether concealed. Besides,

3. Much may be attributed to the Envy, Prejudice, and Ill-will of others; which make them loath to allow him his just tribute of Commendation, and willing to depreciate his real Virtues, lest the Lustre of them should eclipse their own, which is the reason that they do not appear to them so great as they really are, nor are they so represented by them to others. I may add

Lastly, That another reason why the Excellency of a true Christian's Character is so little known is, because it is too often blemished and deformed by some real Imperfections of his own. The World will always take more notice of a good Man's Faults than of his Virtues. And though the former may be very small in comparison of the latter, yet they are oftentimes so far magnified as entirely to eclipse them. And both may sometimes be so promiscuously blended together as to make it difficult to separate them; which may possess others with

with a much worse Opinion of a very good Man than he deserves.

These considerations now duly weighed, it appears no strange thing at all that some of the best of Men should be so little known, or so little taken notice of as such; that though they be eminent for all the Branches of real Goodness, and preserve the divine Life with vigour in their Souls, it should notwithstanding be so much hid from the World; or that the Spiritual Life should be a *bidden Life*. But

2. Not only the Christian's Spiritual Life here, but his Eternal Life hereafter is a *bidden Life* too.

And this is not only hid from others but from himself also. *It doth not yet appear to him what he shall be.* Only in general he knows that *when Christ* who is the purchaser of this Life *shall appear, he also shall appear with him in Glory.* As it is in the verse immediately after the Text. He hath very low, weak, defective Ideas of those things that are not seen, and cannot be seen by any mortal Eye. An impenetrable vail hides from him the Glories of the other World. And whilst his Soul
is

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is imprisoned in Flesh and he converses only with incarnate Beings, he is not able to form the least Conception how he shall live in an unimbodyed State, or what Satisfaction he shall enjoy in conversing with pure, immaterial Spirits. These things at present are very inconceivable, and much more unutterable. For the Apostle Paul who had a transient view of them in a Vision saith, that they are not to be described. And therefore that Eternal Life which the Christian is Heir to may as yet be said to be a *bidden Life*. But to proceed.

Lastly, There still remains another part of the Description of the Christian's Life to be opened, viz. that it is *bid with Christ in God*.

This Expression at first view carries in it some Obscurity, and therefore requires to be distinctly considered. And as by the Christian's Life I understood both his Spiritual Life here, and his Eternal Life hereafter, when it is said to be a *bidden Life*, so both these may be said to be *bid with Christ in God*:

1. His Spiritual Life.

This is said,

1. To

1. To be hid *with Christ*. He himself once lived in Flesh and conversed with objects of Sense as we do now. But he is gone where our Eyes behold him not; He is hid from mortal Sight; and with him are hid the first Springs and Principles of a Christian's Spiritual Life, which flow from him. As we behold the winding Rivulets and Streams wandering in irregular Channels through the verdant Plains, but cannot trace them up to their first Source, or the secret Springs that feed them, which are often *hid* at the Bottom of impenetrable Rocks and Mountains, so though the Spiritual Life in the Heart of a Christian be not so totally hid but that it may in some degree be discerned by others, and by the true believer himself, yet the first Principle of this divine Life is hid with Christ, from whom it flows; for it is by continual supplies from him that it is preserved, by the constant Aids and Influences of his Grace sent down from above, and the effectual Operations of his Spirit on the Heart, which if once interrupted, the Christian's Spiritual Life and Vigour would as certainly decay, as the Rivers would be exhausted
when



The Christian's Life

when the Springs and Sources that supply them are stopped up.

But these secret Springs of Grace are hid; they are hid with Christ in Heaven; and can no more be discerned by us now than he himself can, whilst he sits at his Father's right Hand in Glory. Christ is the Fountain of the Spiritual Life, as well as the Author of Eternal Life; it is by his quickening Influences that the Divine Life is preserved in the Soul; and as these are hidden Springs of Grace, so the Spiritual or Divine Life which is maintained by them may be said to be hid with Christ from whom they flow. And this I think may suffice to explain the first thing. But

2. The Life of Grace or the Religious Life of a Christian is said not only to be hid *with Christ*, but *in God*. *Your Life is hid with Christ in God*. That is, your Life of Faith and Holiness is a divine *Life*, it is a Life in God, as it derives from, so centers *in him*; just as the Rivers all return to the Ocean from whence they Originally came.

It is in God that we live naturally, for *in him we live, and move, and have our Being*; and
in

in him we live spiritually; by directing to him those holy Affections which are inspired by him, by centering all our Hope and Happiness in him, finding our sweetest Pleasure in the Contemplation of him, and our greatest Happiness in the Enjoyment of him, for *in his Favour is Life*, that is, the Life of our Souls.

Moreover, the Christian's Life may be said to be hid in God, by reason of that spiritual Union there is between God and him, which the Apostle *John* mentions, *1 John iv. 16. He that dwelleth in Love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

Thus then I hope you plainly see how a Christian's Spiritual Life is understood to be hid *with Christ in God*.

2. Let us now take the other Sense of the Words as they signify the future *Eternal Life*. And

1. This also is hid *with Christ*. In as much as he is gone before to prepare and take possession of it for his Saints; and is entered into heaven as their *Forerunner*.

It was with this Consideration that he endeavoured to console the dejected Spirits of his Disciples, over-grieved at the
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Thoughts of his leaving them. *In my Father's House (saith he) there are many Mansions, and I go to prepare a Place for you. (c)*

The spiritual Presence of Christ is the Joy of all true Christians on Earth, and they long to see him whom having not seen they love. His presence will be the Joy of Heaven. To be with him is Life. And therefore their Life is hid with him in Heaven; and they now rejoice in Hope, whilst they believe and trust in his Word, that *where he is, there shall they be also.* Their Life of Glory hereafter is hid with Christ as the Purchaser and Preparer of it, as their Life of Grace is hid with him now as the Author and Preserver of it. But

2. This their future Glorious Life is also hid in God. That is, it consists in the immediate and uninterrupted Enjoyment of God, or of his Favour and Presence for ever; *in whose Presence is fulness of Joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.* And, O, how infinitely different will the immediate Enjoyment of God in Heaven be from the imperfect Enjoyment of him here on Earth! The full Fruition of the

(c) John xiv. 2;

the ever blessed God is the Perfection of a Creature's Happiness. This is the Happiness that is laid up in Heaven for all those who sincerely love and serve him here. But how great this Happiness is, they must be content to be Ignorant of till they come to enjoy it. — O, may our Life thus be *hid with Christ in God!* that when Christ who is our Life shall appear, we also may appear with him in Glory.

Thus have I endeavoured to set before you the true sense of these words in the plainest Light I can. I shall now conclude with two or three brief Inferences from the whole. And

1. We hence see wherein the Essence of all true Religion doth consist.

It is not a little strange that the Nature of true Religion should be in general so much mistaken. By true Religion I mean saving Religion; or that which is necessary to fit us for Happiness and Heaven. I say, it is strange that this should be so often mistaken when both Scripture and Reason so evidently shew us wherein it lies. — For let us but think with ourselves thus. — Most certain

“ it

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“it is that *that* is true Religion and that
 “only which fits and qualifies us for the
 “Happiness of Heaven. Wherein does that
 “Happiness consist, but in the Presence and
 “Enjoyment of God? And what can qua-
 “lify us for the Presence and Enjoyment of
 “God hereafter, but to love him, and be
 “like to him now?” This, for certain then,
 and nothing less than this is true Religion.
 Reason itself strongly tells us so, and Scrip-
 ture abundantly confirms it.

But in order to this we must be *dead to Sin*. The Power of Sin must be mortified, and the Habits of it subdued. For whilst we are *the Servants of Sin* in vain do we pretend to be the Servants of God; for nothing renders us more unlike to him, nothing makes it more impossible for us to love him, who is Purity and Holiness itself. So sure is it, what our text tells us, that we must be *dead to Sin*, before we can have any rational or solid Hope that *our Life is hid with Christ in God*.

2. These considerations should then excite and preserve in us an habitual fear and abhorrence of all Sin in general.

If

If our Souls be not dead to Sin, Sin will be the Death of our Souls. It will, it necessarily must exclude us from Eternal Life. Every Man's own Conscience and Reason will tell him so, if he does but reflect what Eternal Life means. It is to be with Christ, and to live in the Presence of the most holy God for ever. And is it possible for a Soul to hope for this, in whom Sin reigns with an unsubdued Dominion? No, it is the Death of Sin only that is the Christian's Spiritual Life; and it is his Spiritual Life that is his only proper preparation for Eternal Life.

Lastly, What hath been said upon this Subject should recall to our minds the Infinite Obligations we owe to the great Redeemer of our Souls.

He dies to purchase our deliverance from Eternal Death; *and bore our Sins in his own Body on the Tree, that we being dead unto Sin, might live unto Righteousness.* Our Spiritual and Eternal Life are both hid in him, and derived from him, the former as the Operation of his Grace, and the latter as the Purchase of his Blood. So that in

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every View he is the great Author of our Salvation, and the worthy Object of our highest Praises. *Blessing, and Honour, and Glory, and Power, then be unto Him that sitteth on the Throne, and to the LAMB for ever and ever.*



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S E R M O N VIII.

Of RENOVATION.

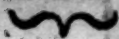


GAL. VI. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature.

THE great Controversy among the Christians in the Apostolick Age was, whether the Gentile Converts to Christianity were bound to be Circumcised and observe the Law of *Moses*. The Jewish Christians out of zeal for their old Constitution were on the affirmative Side of this Question, all the

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Gentiles together with the Apostles were against it. This single debate created dangerous Divisions in the very Infancy of the Church; and chafed the Passions and kindled the Spirits of the new Converts on both sides to such a degree, that the cooling and composing of them occasioned the Apostle *Paul* no small Trouble.

It was principally with this View that he wrote his Epistles to the *Romans*, *Galatians*, and *Ephesians*; in which he uses many Arguments with the Jewish Converts, with a view to weaken their strong Attachment to their old Law, and the Ceremonies of the Mosaick Institution; assuring them that under the dispensation of the Gospel they availed nothing at all to their Justification and Acceptance with God. And this it will be proper for us to keep in our minds as a Key to those Epistles, which will easily open to us the true meaning of the Apostle in many parts of them, which otherwise we shall find *hard to be understood*.

This affair at length was determined by a Council of the Apostles which met for this purpose at *Jerusalem*. In consequence of which they dispatched Letters to the Jews at *Antioch*,

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Antioch, enjoining them by their Apostolick Authority “no longer to unsettle and perplex the Minds of the converted Gentiles “by telling them (as they had done) that “*unless they were Circumcised, and kept the “Law of Moses, they could not be saved; which “they had spoken without any authority “from them; for that it was resolved by “them, the Apostles, met in Counsel under “direction of the Holy Ghost, to lay no greater burden upon the Gentiles than the Observation of these few necessary things, “viz. that they abstain from meats offered to “Idols, and from Blood, and from things “strangled, and from Fornication, (a).”*

But even this remedy did not prove effectual. And the Heat of the Controversy, notwithstanding this Decision of it by Apostolical Authority, still continued, especially on the part of the Jews, who could never be brought to think, that the antient Law of Circumcision could on any account be dispensed with.

The Apostle therefore finding it impossible to convince them, endeavours to mollify them, and to call off their Attention from

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this

(a) Acts xv, 23, 29.

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this insnaring debate by fixing it on things of much higher Concern and tells them plainly, that these things in which their zeal was so warmly engaged were nothing at all in comparison of that great important point, which was allowed by all to be essential to the Christian Life and Character, *viz. a thorough change of Heart, and the intimate Conversion of the Soul to God*; without which they could not be true Christians, which ever side of the Question they might espouse. *For in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature.*

This is the Occasion upon which the Apostle expresses himself in the manner he does in the Text. But before I enter upon my immediate design from the words, I cannot forbear making four previous Remarks upon the state of the forementioned Controversy as it stood in the Apostle's Days, and which we may find very applicable to some in our own.

I. That Christians even then shewed a great deal of Zeal and Contention about unnecessary things. And indeed matters of the

the smallest Importance have often been the Occasion of the most uncharitable Feuds.

2. That they who maintained the wrong side of the Question were the most warm, eager, and censorious. The Jewish Christians were certainly wrong in their Notions, and yet were the most zealously attached to them. And a very little Observation will convince us that the Case is pretty much the same still.

3. No Evidence or Authority will convince a false Zeal. If the Decision of an Apostolick Synod could not do it then, it is a vain Thing to expect it from the Arguments or Authority of any private Persons now.

4. Therefore the best way to cool and mollify the Minds of Christians that are grown warm and rigid in a debate about unnecessary things, is to call them off to those things which are confessedly most necessary; in the great Importance of which all parties are agreed. Which is the Method the Apostle takes in the Text, where he tells the contending Brethren, that *in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature.*

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And he had more than once said the same before, *Gal. v. 6. For in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing; nor Uncircumcision, but Faith that worketh by Love.*

1 Cor. vii. 19. Circumcision is nothing, and Uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the Commandments of God.

But it is time to apply myself now to that which I principally intend from the words, viz. distinctly to open the true Nature and great Importance of the Scripture Doctrine of RENOVATION. And in order hereunto I propose

I. To lay down a few preliminary Propositions necessary to illustrate the Subject we are about to consider.

II. To shew you particularly and plainly wherein the great Change implied in the Phrase, *a new Creature*, doth consist.

III. In what manner or by what means it is effected.

IV. To open to you the absolute Necessity and Importance of such a Change.

V. To suggest a few precautions proper to guard the Mind against running into Mistakes and Extremes in this Affair.

Lastly,

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Lastly, To conclude with a particular Application of the Subject.

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I. I am to lay down a few preliminary Propositions as necessary to illustrate the Subject we are about to consider.

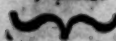
1. Then, this Doctrine which the Apostle refers to in the Text, what ever it be, is of the utmost Weight and Consequence.

This we may easily gather from the Stress that is laid upon it not only in the Text, but in every place of Scripture where it is mentioned or referred to. And it's indispensable Necessity and universal Concern will more fully appear in the Sequel of the Discourse.

2. Scripture generally speaks of it in figurative or metaphorical Terms.

So in the Text it is called a *new Creature* or (*καὶν κτίσις*) a *new Creation*. Because hereby a Person may be said to become a new Man, or quite another Creature from what he was before. And hence also it is sometimes called *Renovation*, which signifies the same thing. And under this Metaphor Scripture very often speaks of this Doctrine, which evidently shews the great Importance of it.

If

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If any Man be in Christ he is a NEW CREATURE; old things are past away, and, behold, all things are become new, (b). And have put on the NEW MAN, which is renewed in Knowledge, after the Image of Him that Created him, (c). And be renewed in the Spirit of your Mind; and that ye put on that NEW MAN which after God is created in Righteousness and true Holiness, (d).

Again, it is often represented in Scripture under the Notion of a *new Birth*. And hence it called *Regeneration*. John iii. 3. *Except a Man be BORN AGAIN he cannot see the Kingdom of God.* 1 Pet. ii. 2. *As NEW BORN Babes desire the sincere Milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby.* And both these Metaphors, as expressive of the same thing, are put together in Tit. iii. 5. *According to his Mercy he saved us, by the washing of REGENERATION and RENEWING of of the holy Ghost.*

In other places of the new Testament it is called *Life* and *Spirit*, or *Spiritual Life*, (e).

And

(b) 2 Cor. v. 17. (c) Col. iii. 10 (d) Eph. iv. 23. 24.

(e) Col. iii. 3. 1 Joh. iii. 14. Rom. viii. 9. Gal. v. 17.

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And in the old Testament a *new Heart*, a *clean Heart*, and a *Heart of Flesh*, (f). All which you plainly see are figurative or metaphorical Expressions, meaning the same thing. But

3. This great Doctrine in other places of Scripture is mentioned in very plain and easy Language.

Sometimes it is called *turning to the Lord*. *Hof. xiv. 2. Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord. Luke. i. 16. And many of the Children of Israel shall be turn to the Lord their God.* And hence it is generally called *Conversion*.

But it is more commonly called *Repentance*. This Expression denotes what we are to turn *from*, as the other what we are to turn *to*.

Nay, *Faith* is sometimes put to denote the whole of this Change, (g); and sometimes *Holiness*, (b); and *Obedience*, (i); as the genuine and inseparable Effects of it.

4. When we meet with Similes and metaphorical Expressions in Scripture we should take heed we do not overstrain them, and pursue

(f) Ezek. xviii. 31. Psa. lxxiii. 1. Ez. xxxvi. 26.

(g) Gal. v. 6. (b) Heb. xii. 14. (i) 1 Cor. vii. 19.

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pursue them through all the Inferences which a lively Fancy may suggest; but especially must we take heed, that we do not establish those overstrained and far-fetched Inferences as necessary Doctrines of Scripture. Which, as I shall hereafter shew, hath been the Foundation of all those Mistakes which some have been led into with regard to this great Doctrine of Regeneration. But when we have well considered the principle thing intended by the Metaphor, for the sake of which it was used, and which often throws great Light upon the Doctrine expressed by it, we are then to dismiss it.

5. It is a known and well established Rule in interpreting the sacred Writings, to make use of them as their own Expositor; for they are always found to be the best Comment upon themselves.

What I mean is, that we should explain the dark and figurative Phrases of Scripture by those that are more plain and easy. I shall illustrate this by one very obvious Instance. Would we know what the Apostle means by a *new Creature* in the Text, where he opposes it to the Controversy about Circumcision and Uncircumcision, let us see how he

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he explains it in other places where he mentions it with the same View, but in different Terms. See *Gal. v. 6. In Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but Faith that worketh by Love. 1 Cor. vii. 19. Circumcision is nothing, and Uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the Commandments of God. Rom. ii. 28. 29. He is not a Jew that is one outwardly, neither is that Circumcision that is outward in the Flesh; but he is a Jew that is one inwardly, and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose praise is not of Men but of God.* Hence it is evident, that what the Apostle calls in our Text a *new Creature*, he calls in another place, *Faith that worketh by Love*, in another, *keeping the Commandments of God*, and in another, *the Circumcision of the Heart*.

Lastly, From all these things put together we may justly conclude, that *that* which the Apostle in the Text understands by a *new Creature* is, “ the entire turn of the “ Heart from Sin to God, effected by his “ Power, and evidenced by that Faith and “ Obedience, which are necessary to all “ Christians in order to Salvation.”

But

But to come now to a closer Discussion of the Subject;

II. I proceed to shew in a plain and particular manner, wherein this great Change of the Heart doth consist.

And that I may be the more distinct and clear in a Subject, which by nice and elaborate Explications has been too much entangled, I shall endeavour

1. To shew you the true Nature.
2. The genuine Effects of this great Change in the Heart, implied in the Phrase *a new Creature.*

1. Let us attend to the true nature of it. It consists you see in the effectual turn of the Heart from Sin to God.—This must imply then

1. An habitual and constant hatred of Sin; and
2. A supreme and prevailing Love to God.

1. An habitual and constant Hatred of Sin.

This is absolutely necessary to an effectual Turn from it. For whilst a Man continues

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nues in Love with Sin, he will continue in the Allowance of it. He will see no great Evil in it, because his Love for it will prejudice and pervert his Judgment. He will not fear it, and therefore will be at no pains to avoid it. Instead of hating it, he will rather hate those who endeavour to convince him of it, and stop his Career in it.

They who live in a Love of Sin, cannot love the Word of God, where they see it and themselves so often censured and condemned; nor can they love the faithful Ministers of God, who shew them to themselves by holding up to them the Glass of God's Word. In short, their Love of Sin will render them averse to all the Remedies and Means proposed in the Gospel for the Destruction of it. And therefore most certain it is, that till they hate it they cannot turn from it, and till they see the Evil of it they cannot hate it; and if they will not seriously consider it's destructive Nature and dreadful Effects, so often shewn them in the Word of God, and the Course of his Providence, they will never be able to see the Evil of it.

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But now, when Men once come to be-
think themselves in good earnest, and by
carefully considering the true Nature and
Tendency of things, are thoroughly convinced
of the infinite Evil of Sin; and under that
Conviction begin to fear and hate it, they
have then made one very considerable Step,
by the Grace of God, toward that great
Change of Heart and Life which is abso-
lutely necessary to their final Happiness.

2. In Consequence of this there will be a
sincere Love to God.

A sincere Love to God, I say, is the Con-
sequence of a thorough Hatred of Sin. For
the Love of God and the Love of Sin are
principles so infinitely opposite, that they
can never both prevail in the same Heart,
but one will necessarily exclude the other.
And if we hate Sin for it's Contrariety to
God, we love God for himself. They who
are in Love with Sin do in their Hearts hate
God. And this is one of the black Marks
with which the Scriptures brand them, *Rom.*
i. 30. Haters of God; than which a worse
thing cannot be said of Man. But nothing
is more true. There is undoubtedly a la-
tent Enmity in the Heart of every wicked
Man

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Man against the Blessed God; which often discovers itself by an Aversion to his Word and Ways, and Worship, and every thing which he requires and loves.

Now this great Work of Spiritual Renovation begins with the Removal of this Enmity of the Heart against God, and is complete in the supreme Love of him. In this all true Religion, and indeed the very Happiness of every human Soul consists. And therefore when our Saviour was asked what was the great Commandment of the Law, he instanced in this, as the Sum of all true Religion both under the old and new Dispensation, *thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and Soul, and Mind, and Might, (k).*

These then are the two great principles from which this holy Change of the Heart arises, or with which it begins. And let it be remembered, that this Change of the Heart always implies a correspondent Reformation of the Life. When a Man's Desires and Affections are holy, his Character and Conduct will be so too. He will forsake his former sinful Course and Company, which

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only

(k) Math. xxii. 37.

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only emboldened him in the Ways of Vice, and associate with them whose Example will be his Motive and Encouragement to universal Virtue. But will follow them no further than they follow Christ. He no longer takes the Practices of Men, but the Precepts of God, for his Rule and Guide. To these he will adhere, and by these he resolves to walk, though in so doing he incur the Odium of Singularity, and the Contempt of all the Profane and Wicked part of Mankind.

This then in Brief is that great and holy Change in the Heart of Man, which is expressed by such a Variety of Terms both proper and figurative in the Word of God. It is an effectual and habitual Turn from the Practice of all known Sin to the Practice of universal Holiness, arising from a Principle of a thorough Hatred to Sin as the greatest Evil, and a supreme Love to God as the greatest Good. And this Change of Heart and Life, when it takes place in one who hath been notoriously Wicked, appears so great and surprizing that it may fitly enough be called a *Renovation* or *Regeneration*. That is, the Man is (as it were) *new made* or *new born*;

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born; quite altered and become another Creature; which is all that is intended by those metaphorical Expressions.

And having thus considered this Spiritual Change as to it's Nature and first Principles, I am now

2. To consider it with regard to it's genuine Effects.

Which are such as these.

1. A *tendernefs of Conscience.*

That is, such a Sense of Religion and such a Reverence of God impressed upon the Mind, as makes us cautious and fearful of offending him in Thought, Word, or Deed. And this in Scripture Language is called a *soft Heart*, or a *Heart of Flesh*, in opposition to a *hard Heart* or a *Heart of Stone*. Ez. xxxvi. 26. *A new Heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony Heart out of your Flesh, and will give you a Heart of Flesh.* So *Josiah* when he heard the Message of the Lord, delivered by *Huldah* the Prophetess, denouncing Evil against *Jerusalem*, is said to have a *tender Heart*, 2 Kings xxii. 19. That is, as the Words following

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explain



explain it, *he humbled himself before the Lord, and rent his Clothes, and wept.*

So that this Scripture Phrase, *a tender Heart*, or a *Heart of Flesh*, chiefly denotes these two things. 1. A Mind easily and deeply impressed with the things of God and Religion. 2. A holy Reverence of God, and a conscientious Fear of offending him. And when this is apparent, it is a good Sign of a real Conversion, because it is one of the genuine Effects of it. Whereas an impenitent and unregenerate Sinner is said in Scripture to have a *hard Heart*; that is, he remains untouched, and unimpressed by the most important Concerns relating to his Soul, and has no reverent *Fear of God before his Eyes*.

2. A lively and active *Faith* is another genuine Effect of Regeneration.

And by that it is expressed, in that place parallel to the Text, *Gal. v. 6. For in Jesus Christ neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but Faith which worketh by Love.* That is, not a Dead, inoperative Faith, or Faith without Works, for that an unregenerate Man may have, but a vital, influential Faith; a Faith that produces

produces a holy Life ; that is *inwrought with Charity*, as the Original Word signifies in the place before mentioned, (1) ; and is ever attended with a supreme Love to God, and a sincere Love to Man ; such a firm and reverent Belief of God and his Word as wholly bows and subjects the Soul to his Authority, a Faith which looks through the Veil that intercepts Future and Eternal things from the Eye of Sense, and realises the unseen Objects of the other World ; a Faith that animates the Soul with Devotion, supports it under Affliction, and gives it Life and Joy in holy Duties. The Exercise of such a Faith is a sure Sign, and certain Effect of a true Spiritual *Renovation*.

3. A sincere, impartial, and uniform *Obedience* to the Commands of the Gospel, is another sure Effect of this great Change, by which it may be known.

The first Breathing of a converted Soul is, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?* As you may see in the case of the Apostle Paul, *Acts ix. 6.* And that which is called a *new Creature* in the Text is elsewhere called

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keeping

(1) *Δι' ἀγάπης ενεργουμένη.* Worked in with Love, as the Warp is with the Woof.

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keeping the Commandments of God, (m). As soon as the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made the Soul free from the Law of Sin and Death, it finds a Freedom and Sweetness in the Ways of Obedience, it never found before. It is no longer the Servant of Sin, to which it was enslaved, but gives itself up to the Service of God, not only as it's Duty but Delight. The Language of such a Soul is, I delight to do thy Will, O God; yea, thy Law is in my Heart, Ps. xl. 8.

4 A sincere and hearty *Love to all good Men* as such, is another genuine Effect of the new Creation.

For they that love God supremely, because he is the most pure and holy Being, cannot but love them sincerely who are like him in Purity and Holiness. They may perhaps discern in them many Imperfections and Weaknesses, which are inseparable from the best of Men; these cannot be the Object of their Love, and for these they are disposed to make the most charitable Allowances, on account of that truly pious and God-like Temper which through many Defects

visibly

(m) 1 Cor. vii. 19.

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visibly appears at the Bottom. And if notwithstanding such unamiable Qualities, which they discern in some good Men, they still Love, Honour, and Esteem them, and even more than they do those who are happier in their natural Temper, but discover nothing of the Divine Image, this is a good Sign of of a real Conversion. The Apostle *John*, I am sure, takes particular notice of it as such, 1 *John* iii. 14. *We know that we are passed from Death unto Life, because we love the Brethren.*

5. Another genuine Effect of Conversion is a Delight in the Duty of Prayer.

Free Respiration is not a surer Sign of natural Life than devout Aspiration is of the Spiritual. As soon as the new Creature is born from above it begins to *breath upwards*. This likewise is evident in the Case of the Apostle *Paul*. The first words he uttered after his Conversion were in a way of Prayer. And this was told to *Ananias* as a certain Proof of his Conversion, *Behold, he prays!* *Acts* ix. 11. He had without doubt often prayed before; for the *Pharisees* were famous for long prayers. But those prayers which he put up when he was a *Pharisee*,

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are here made no Account of with God. But now, sais he, *Behold, he prays!* He prays indeed; prays from the Heart.

Lastly, A sincere Delight in and Esteem for the Word of God is another sure Sign and Evidence of Conversion, because it is one of the genuine Effects and Consequences of it.

A Contempt of and Disesteem for the sacred Scriptures is an infallible Proof of an unregenerate Heart. But they *who are begotten again by the Word of Truth, will, like new born Babes, desire the sincere Milk of the Word that they may grow thereby, (n).*

These then are some of the genuine Effects and natural Consequences of that real and holy Change of Heart and Life before described, and which in our Text the Apostle calls *a new Creature*. In comparison of which all the Controversies which were then on Foot among Christians were of no Importance at all.

I should now proceed to shew you how this great Change is wrought in the Heart; and then open to you the vast Importance of it; and lay down a few precautions against

(n) Jam. i. 18. 1 Pet. ii. 2.

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gainst Mistakes in it. But these things must be the Subject of an ensuing Discourse.

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In the mean time let us briefly apply what hath been said to ourselves.

And 1. Don't let us think this a hard or severe Doctrine; or say, if such be the Gospel Terms of Salvation, *Who then can be Saved?*

Instead of complaining that the Gate is streight and the Way narrow that leads to Life, let us *strive* to enter in. If the Gate be streight it is open, if the way be narrow it is direct. If few there be that find it, let us take the greater Care not to miss it. And such is the Light and Grace the Gospel affords, that if we do not find it and walk therein we have none to blame but ourselves. And he must be a very thoughtless or very hardened Creature that dares to venture his Eternal Interests on any other bottom, or look for Salvation on any other Terms than those the Gospel offers.

This certainly deserves our most serious Consideration if any thing does. The Word of God tells us we must be *born again, born of the Spirit*, if we would enter into the Kingdom of God. And that every one that

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that is in *Christ Jesus*, (that is, a real Christian) *is a new Creature*. What is the true meaning of this Phrase I have endeavoured, with all the Care I can, to open to you from the plainest Scriptures; and have shewn you that it can signify nothing less than the intire Turn of the Heart from Sin to God, and the intire change of the Life from the habitual Practice of Sin, to the habitual Practice of universal Holiness and Virtue. It is to hate Sin with all it's Appearances, and fear it as the greatest Evil; and to love God with all our Hearts, and to delight in him as the chief Good.—My Friends, these are not Words of Course; they are substantial Truths and the most important Realities. This it is to be a Christian. Thus only can we be fit for Heaven, if we believe the Word of God, and take that for the Rule of our Faith. If we form our Judgment indeed by the common Practices of Men, or the Sentiments of those who care to have little to do with Scripture, we shall think otherwise. But I would not have any Man, however wise he may think himself, be over confident that he is right, whilst the Bible is expressly against him.

Take

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Take these things, I beseech you, into serious Consideration, till you have it demonstrated to you (as in the next Discourse you will) from the very Nature of things, that nothing less than this can form your Happiness in another World, or make you fit for it. In the mean time,

2. Let us all by what hath been said impartially examine the State of our own Souls, and see if we have any solid Ground to believe that this great Change hath been wrought in us.

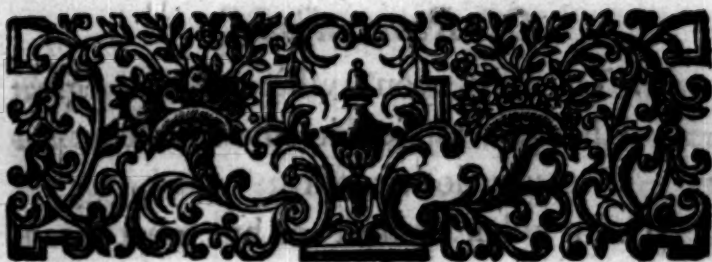
Do we hate Sin heartily under all it's Appearances, and love God supremely under all Providences, with that predominant Fervour which our Lord expresses in those Words, *with all our Hearts, with all our Strength, with all our Mind, and with all our Might?* Do the strongest Desires of our Soul tend to him as the Centre of all Excellence? Are our Hearts soon impressed with the things of God? And do we fear Sin more than Suffering? Does our Faith in God and future things quicken, guard, and elevate our Souls; animate our Duties, warm our Devotions, and exalt us above the World? Do we find our principal Delight in the Service
of

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of God; and love all good Men for his sake; and feel a sweet and secret Pleasure in conversing with Him by Reading, Meditation, and Prayer?—If so, we have all the Evidence we can desire that we *are passed from Death unto Life*; that *we are born of God, renewed after his Image*, are fit for, and therefore shall for certain be received to, the everlasting Enjoyment of Him in Heaven.



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S E R M O N IX.

OF RENOVATION.

GAL. vi. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature.



FROM these Words I proposed to treat of the great Doctrine of *Spiritual Renovation*, implied in those Words of the Text a *new Creature*, in the following Method.

I. To lay down a few preliminary Propositions necessary to prepare our way for the Subject we are about to consider.

II.

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II. To shew you wherein that great Change, implied in the Phrase *a new Creature*, doth consist.

III. In what manner or by what means it is effected.

IV. To open to you the great Necessity and Importance of such a Change.

V. To suggest a few Precautions proper to guard the Mind against Mistakes and Extremes in this Affair.

Lastly, To conclude with a particular Application of the Subject.

The two first of these I have already dispatched; I apply myself now immediately to the Consideration of the third, *viz.*

III. To shew in what manner, or by what means this great Change is to be effected.

Here Men are apt to run into different Extremes. For

I. Some imagine the Work to be altogether Supernatural; and that a wicked Man hath no power at all to do any thing towards his Conversion. And the Advocates for this Opinion found it on such Scriptures as these.

— *No Man can come unto me, except the Father*

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ther which hath sent me draw him, (o). Without me ye can do nothing, (p). Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, (q). By Grace ye are saved, through Faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the Gift of God. Not of Works, lest any Man should boast, (r). Which seem to attribute the whole Work to God exclusive of all human Agency or Concourse. But

2. Others exclude all supernatural Agency, and attribute the whole Work to human Power. And for this Opinion they cite the following places.—*Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes; cease to do Evil, learn to do well, (s). Repent, and turn ye from all your Transgressions, so Iniquity shall not be your Ruin; cast away from you all your Transgressions whereby ye have Transgressed, and make you a new Heart, and a new Spirit, for why will ye die, O House of Israel, (t)? O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you—but ye would not, (u)! Work out your own*

(o) John vi. 44. (p) John xv. 5. (q) 2 Cor. iii. 5.
(r) Eph. ii. 8, 9. (s) Isai. i. 16, 17. (t) Ezek. xvi. 30, 31. (u) Math. xxiii. 37.

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own Salvation with Fear and Trembling, (w).
 And all those warm Expostulations and Exhortations which we find so often addressed to Sinners in the Word of God to repent and live, which seem to imply that the thing is intirely in their own power.

Now the Advocates for the former Opinion think that their Notion is most honourable to the free Grace of God; and they who are for the latter, say that theirs is most agreeable to the rational Nature of Man, as a moral Agent. But against them both it may be replied; that the Notion of the former is incompatible with the Freedom of human Agency, and that of the latter dishonourable to the Grace of God. That the Scriptures alledged by the latter, do strongly oppose the Notions of the former; and those produced by the former do as much contradict the Opinion of the latter; and if either of them be true, Scripture must contradict itself. And this is a common Dilemma with which Men who go into Extremes are often embarrassed. It follows then that neither of them can be true. And that Truth lies some where in the Middle between these two Extremes,

(w) Phil. iii. 12.

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Extremes ; or consists in some Sentiment that is equally honourable to the Grace of God, and agreeable to the rational Nature of Man, and whereby all the forementioned Scriptures urged on either side may be fairly reconciled.

And what is that now but to suppose that this great Change is to be attributed to both these Causes ; to the Grace of God as the supreme and effectual Cause, and to Human Agency as the inferior and conditional Cause ; but both equally necessary to the Effect. Or in other Words, that it is the powerful Grace of God that effectually works this Change in the Hearts of Men ; but it is in a way of Concourse or Co-operation with their own sincere endeavours after it. In so much that by the utmost human Endeavours, without the Grace of God, the Work cannot be effected ; but by this Grace, concurring with those Endeavours, it easily may. So that the Divine Grace and Human Agency are so far from opposing, that they coincide and co-operate with one another. And the forementioned Scriptures, instead of contradicting each other, will thus appear in the most beautiful Consistency. And that Scheme of

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Notions I always think most likely to be true, not which seems to be favoured by the sound of here and there a single Expression, but which is most agreeable to the Sense and Tenor of the whole Scriptures taken together; and which fairly and easily reconciles the seeming Contradictions in them.

Thus far then what hath been said, I hope, is plain and evident to all. But the great Question that arises hereupon is, what is necessary on our part in order to this great Change? We see there is a Necessity that something be done by us, as well as something done for us. And if we be not wanting on our part, we may be sure that God will not be wanting on his. And what is necessary on our part in this great Work, is the Subject of our present Enquiry.

The Spiritual *Renovation* spoken of in the Text, I observed, consists in the *effectual Turn of the Heart from Sin to God, arising from an habitual Hatred of all Sin as the greatest Evil, and an habitual Love to God as the chief Good.* Now in order to this, it is necessary that we know what Sin is, that we seriously consider the infinite Evil of it, that we avoid all the known Temptations to it, that

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that we frequently think of God, and endeavour to fix in our Minds just and right Apprehensions of him, that we keep close to him by a diligent Attendance on all the Appointments of his Worship, and in this way earnestly pray for and depend upon the Divine Grace to make us *new Creatures*.

Don't let us look for Instantaneous Conversions, or sudden and preternatural Operations. If ever we are born again, and renewed to a Spiritual and Divine Life, it must be by the Grace of God working effectually in our Hearts, whilst we are sincerely labouring and seeking after it in some such way as that I have just mentioned. Instantaneous Conversions are to be placed in the number of those Miracles which were peculiar to the Apostolick Age, and therefore not to be looked for in this.

But to consider the foregoing Particulars a little more distinctly.

I. The first thing that is necessary on our part, in order to the effectual Turn of the Heart from Sin to God, is to know what Sin is.

Sin is a Transgression of some Law; for *for where there is no Law, there is no Transgression,*

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gression, (x). Now the Law by which Christians as moral Agents are to live, is Scripture and Reason, or the Law of Revelation, and the Law of Nature, taken conjunctly; for they do not oppose but illustrate each other. What ever therefore is contrary to plain Scripture and right Reason is Sin.

If we judge of Sin by this Rule (and it is the only right Rule we have to judge by) we shall soon see a great many things very vile and criminal, which otherwise we should not allow to be so. And we can never be brought to forsake the Sins we are not convinced of. Till a Man feels he is sick, he will be in no care about a Physician.

The first thing then that is necessary to the Conversion of a Sinner is to be convinced that he is one. In order to which he must throw aside every corrupt prejudice he hath contracted by a vain and vicious Course of Life; impartially use his Understanding as a Man, and his Bible as a Christian; and thence inform himself concerning the nature of Sin, the temper of his Soul, the tendency of his Conduct, how he has lived, and how

(x) Rom. iv. 15.

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how he ought to have lived, as a Creature of God, formed for his Service and expectant of his Favour. Let a Man but carefully survey his Life and Conduct in this Glass, and not in the false Light of a depraved Fancy, or popular Opinion, and he will soon see himself to be a viler Creature than perhaps he ever imagined.

Our Saviour tells us that one End for which he would send his Holy Spirit to Men was to *reprove* or convince them of Sin, (y). That is, to shew them what is Sin, as well as the Evil of it. They then who make light of Sin, and will not be convinced of it have not the Spirit of Christ. And *they who have not the Spirit of Christ are none of his*, (z); that is, are no true Christians.

2. The next Step towards Conversion is to have a deep Sense of the dreadful Evil of it.

A Man may be sensible that he is a sinful Creature, and yet have his Conscience so misguided as to apprehend no great Danger from his Sins. His usual pleas are *these*, "I am not worse than most, nor so bad as

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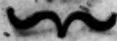
" many

(y) John xvi. 8.

(z) Rom. viii. 9.

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“many are; the Mercy of God is great, and
 “the Merits of Christ Infinite, and there-
 “fore I may hope to escape very well at last
 “without all that Mortification and Trou-
 “ble, which some rigid Preachers recom-
 “mend and urge as necessary.”——Why
 this now is talking again without your Rule,
 and arguing very much beside it. For
 where does *Scripture* or *Reason* teach you to
 draw such a Conclusion? The former tells
 you, that however you may flatter yourselves
 with Peace though *you walk in the Way of*
your own Heart, yet *there is no Peace, saith*
God, to the Wicked, (a). That *there is a way*
which seemeth right unto a Man; but the End
thereof are the Ways of Death, (b). And
 the latter tells you, that the Love of Sin is
 inconsistent with the Love of God; that
 you can never forsake it till you hate and
 fear it; and you can never fear and hate
 what you study to excuse and palliate.

Let a Man but keep to Scripture and Rea-
 son as his Rule, and 'tis impossible for him
 to apologize for Sin, or to talk and reason
 so much in favour of it, as we find a great
 part of Mankind do. And the plain reason
 why

(a) *Isai. lvii. 21.*(b) *Prov. xiv. 12.*

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why they do so is, because they look upon it in a false Light, and judge of it by a false Rule; by the Opinions of Men, and the Practice of the World. And till Men are once brought to lay aside their wrong Rules of Judgment, they must of Necessity judge wrong.

But now let us apply to our right Rule, examine the Word of God and the Reason of things, and we shall see that however light some make of Sin, it is a very bitter and evil thing; infinitely displeasing to God, and dishonourable and destructive to ourselves. Let us view it's odious Nature in the Glass of God's Word, as it is a contradiction to his Will, an insult on his Authority, a Contempt of his Laws, and an Opposition to his Perfections; let us view it's dreadful Effects, in the Ruin of the fallen Angels, the Sufferings of Christ, the numberless Evils it hath brought upon this World, and the endless Misery that will be the Punishment of it in the other; and we can never give into that light and indifferent way of thinking and talking of it which too much obtains in the World. And till a Sinner hath such a View of the dreadful Evil and Effects of Sin, he

SERM. will never be heartily willing to part with
 IX. it. And when he is, the next necessary
 step is,

3. To avoid all the known Temptations to Sin.

This is but a Consequence of a true sense of it's infinite Malignity. They who are not afraid of the Temptations to it, do not consider the Evil of it; nor can they be persuaded to flee what they do not greatly fear. How can he be said to be afraid of a precipice who sleeps on the very Brink of it? of an Adder who takes it into his Bosom? No, were he sensible of his Danger, he would keep at a greater distance; and would be as much afraid of the Infection of Evil examples, as that of the Plague, which is not more fatal to the Body than the former often is to the Soul.

No Sin can be committed without some Temptation to it, from what ever Quarter *that* may arise. And when committed through the Violence of a sudden and unavoidable Temptation, the guilt of it is much less than when indulged through the Power of a small one, which we might have avoided but would not. And considering the
 present

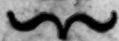


present Weakness of our Natures, the wisest way to keep clear of Sin is to keep out of the way of it. To decline entering the Lists with an Enemy that hath so often been too hard for us; and not be over forward to try our Strength, lest therein we betray our Weakness. And our Spiritual Enemies, like all others, will gain Strength by repeated Conquests. The best method then is to keep them at a Distance; to beware of carnal Security and Self-Confidence, to be still watchful and well-armed, and always prepared for the Encounter when it is unavoidable. The Consequence of which will be in time that our corrupt Lusts and Habits will be sensibly weakened for want of Indulgence, and in the mean time we shall be continually gathering new Strength against them. This is really a point of very great Importance, and deserves to be considered by us as such.----But to proceed.

These things are necessary on the Sinner's part in order to the effectual Turn of his Heart from Sin, which is called *Repentance*. But in order to a thorough *Conversion*, which consists in the habitual Turn of the Heart
to

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to God, there is something further necessary. I therefore add,

4. Would we love God with all our Hearts we must frequently contemplate his Glorious and Excellent Nature, and endeavour to fix and retain in our Minds just and right Apprehensions of him.

There is nothing more helpful to a Life of true Piety than to retain in the Mind right thoughts of God. Sinners are apt to think that he is *altogether such a one as themselves*; or at least to conceive of him as very favourable to those Follies to which they are most inclined; and not, as he is represented in his Word, as a most pure and righteous God, to whom all Sin is infinitely hateful; as a most holy, wise, and just, as well as a most merciful, good, and gracious Being. And when Men give into such partial Sentiments of God in order to excuse the Errors of their Conduct, it is an unspeakable prejudice to Religion and the Interests of their Souls. But we should ponder all his Perfections, set them in a fair united View, consider them in their mutual Consent and Harmony, as displayed in his Works, or as they shine with a dim Light separately
in

in other Beings, and say, "all these belong
"to God in a Degree infinitely beyond what
"we can conceive; and that he is essentially,
"immutably, and eternally such a blessed
"Being." And we should dwell upon the
Thought, retain it, and often recall it for
the Solace and Entertainment of the Mind.
And if we have any sense of true Excellence,
it must attract our Esteem, Desire, and Love,
and lift our Souls in praise.

O were Men to think of God more, they
would love him more; more sensibly taste
the Pleasures of true Piety; and would de-
sire nothing more ardently than a better Ac-
quaintance with him, and a more intimate
relation to, and converse with him. Let us
be perswaded then to contemplate him more
frequently, more intently, and more seriously,
in the complex Glory of all his Attributes;
and especially in the Face of Jesus Christ,
in whom they all shine forth in the most
lovely and distinguished Lustre.

5. Would we love God more we must be
very conversant with his Word, and diligent-
ly draw nigh to him in all his appointed
Ways of Worship.

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Who ever possessed more of the true Spirit of Piety and Devotion, or shewed a more ardent Love to the Blessed God, than the Psalmist *David*? And how did he kindle and cherish this holy Flame, but by a Reverence for, a Delight in, and a diligent Attendance on the Word and Ordinances of God? Which no Man ever more esteemed.

It is not here as it is in human Friendships and Acquaintance, where it is commonly said, *Familiarity breeds Contempt*. The reason of which is plain enough. We quickly see through all created Excellence, a finite Goodness is soon exhausted; through the fair slight Covering, which strikes us at a Distance, we discern upon a nearer view many Defects concealed under it. Men often put on the best Appearance at first, and may have the Address to hide their secret Foibles a good while; which, being detected upon a further Acquaintance, greatly diminish the Esteem we had for them before. But now the direct contrary is true in the Case before us. The more we know God, the more shall we admire his unexhausted Excellence; and our Love to him will always increase with our Knowledge of him.

And

And they that know him most do always love him best. To attain a better Acquaintance then with that infinitely good and blessed Being, is equally our Honour and Happiness.

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And to lead us to the true Knowledge of himself he hath given us his Word, where he hath plainly displayed to us the Glories of his Nature. He hath sent his Son into the World as the *express Image of his Person*. Who hath told us, that *he that hath seen the Son, hath seen the Father also, (c)*. He hath instituted his Ordinances in which we are invited to draw nigh unto him, and converse with him. And hath promised to send his Spirit into our Hearts, whereby he draws nigh to, and Communes with us. Not to say that the Works of Creation and Ways of Providence continually invite us to the most delightful Contemplation of his Infinite Wisdom, Beneficence, and Power.

And thus may we attain that Knowledge of him which will most powerfully attract our Hearts to him,

And to read the Word and attend the Ordinances of God is what none of us can say

(c) John xiv. 9.

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say we have no Power to do: Nay, to stir up our Hearts to wait upon him, to fix our Attention, and engage our Thoughts to what we read and hear. But if instead of this we seldom take the Word of God into our Hands, and never admit it into our Hearts; or if we are backward to come to the holy Ordinances of God, or care not how we behave when we do come; and take no pains to prepare our Hearts for, or engage them in these holy Duties, it is no wonder if we remain destitute of the true Knowledge of God, and consequently of a true Love to him all our Days.

Lastly, We must humbly pray for and depend upon the Grace of God to renew our Hearts, and turn them effectually from Sin unto himself.

The Work at last is his. When we have done all we can, to his Grace must we still impute the mighty Change. We cannot without the Grace of God, renew our own Hearts, any more than a sick Man without the Help of a Physician can heal and recover himself. But both one and the other may use the proper Means prescribed; and if so, the Sinner need not fear his Recovery

ry, when so able and willing a Physician is at Hand. A Simile which, I have often thought, very happily illustrates this Matter; and clearly shews us how far our own Endeavours are necessary herein, and how they must be used, and how far the Grace of GOD is necessary, and in what way it is to be depended upon, for the Cure and Recovery of the Soul from a State of Sin to a State of Grace.

Thus have I shewn you in what manner this great Change of the Heart, called in the Text *a new Creature*, may be effected. That there is something necessary on God's part, and something on ours, is very certain, if we take Scripture in a consistency with itself. That though the Grace of God must work this thorough Change at last, and all the Honour of it be ascribed to him, yet there are several things necessary on the Sinner's part, without which, he cannot reasonably look for, nor safely depend on that Almighty Grace. What these things are I have now particularly opened and explained to you, both as they refer to the effectual Turn of the Heart from Sin, and it's holy Turn to God; the former commonly called

Repentance

SERM. *Repentance, and the latter Conversion.*— I
 IX. now proceed to the next thing proposed, viz.

IV. To shew the Importance and absolute Necessity of such a Change.

We find the greatest Strefs is every where laid upon it in Scripture. John iii. 3. *Jesus answered, and said unto him, except a Man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.* ver. 7. *Marvel not that I say unto thee, ye must be born again.* Math. xviii. 3. *Except ye be converted and become as little Children, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* Rom. viii. 13. *If ye live after the Flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the Deeds of the Flesh, ye shall live; for to be carnally minded is Death, but to be spiritually minded is Life and Peace.* For this you may observe is one of those Phrases I before mentioned, by which this Change of the Heart is set forth in Scripture.

It were easy to multiply places to the same Purpose. But it is needless. It plainly appears from those already mentioned, that this is what the Word of God makes the grand Condition of our future Happiness;

or



or the great point on which our Salvation depends. Let us examine now into the Reason of this, and we shall soon see that from the very nature of things it cannot be otherwise. And the proof of this will lie very open and easy under the following plain Propositions.

Prop. I. That the Blessed God himself is the only Fountain of Happiness to his Creatures.

As they derive their Being from him, they can derive the Happiness of their Being from no other. As he is the Centre in which all Perfections meet, so he is the Source from whence all Felicity flows. What ever contributes to our Prosperity and Comfort in this World, is only the Effect of his overflowing Goodness, or Streams from the Original Fountain; and whatever constitutes our Happiness in the other World can derive from no other Spring. It is the Love and Favour of the ever Blessed God then that is the supreme Felicity of all his Intelligent Creatures.

Prop. II. God is a most pure, wise, holy, and righteous Being.

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His nature is infinitely removed from all moral Blemish or Defilement. Purity is his very Essence, and Sin his Eternal Abhorrence.

Prop. III. God can take pleasure in none but those that are like him.

A Similitude of Nature, Temper, and Disposition is the Foundation of all mutual Complacency. It is impossible for a Man to take pleasure in another whose Nature, Disposition, and Temper is just the reverse of his own; for what is pleasing to one, will be disagreeable to the other. There can be no mutual Delight in their Converse; but on the contrary, a fixt and growing Aversion and eternal Discord. This is the very Case here. The nature of an unconverted Sinner, under the Dominion of his Vices, is so perfectly opposite to that of the most Holy God, that it is absolutely impossible in the very Nature of things that there should be any mutual Concord or Harmony between them. The nature of God or that of the Sinner must be changed, e'er they can take any real Delight in each other. But the Nature of God is immutable, because absolutely perfect. And even a Possibility

bility of changing for the worse would be a Defect. What follows then, but that the Nature of the Sinner must be changed and made like to that of God, before he can enjoy his Love and Favour, in which all his Happiness doth consist. But

Prop. IV. A Man can become no otherwise like to God than by being thus spiritually renewed.

By this effectual Turn of his Heart from Sin to God, which makes him *holy even as God is holy*. Not perfectly, but habitually so; whereas he once hated that which God loves, and loved that which he hates; his Dispositions are now rectified, his Affections purified, his Hopes and Desires sanctified, and he loves that which God loves, and hates that which he hates, and desires nothing more than to be more like him, and to love Him more.

And therefore it is worth observing that Scripture itself calls this great Change we are speaking of a *God-like Nature*, or a *Divine Temper*; as it consists in such a Change of our Natures as makes us like to God, or bears a Resemblance to the moral Rectitude of his.

2 Pet. 1. 4. That ye might be par-

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takers

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takers of the DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the Corruption there is in the World through Lust. But it is impossible for Creatures to partake of the Divine Nature in any other sense than this of moral Rectitude. And therefore this spiritual Renovation the Apostle in one place calls the *Image of the Creator, (d)*; and, in another, tells us expressly that it consists in *Righteousness and true Holiness, (e)*.

Prop. V. Hence then it is evident, not only from Scripture but from the very nature of things, that it is impossible for an unconverted or an unholy Man to be happy hereafter.

Because he cannot enjoy God who is the only Fountain of Felicity. And he cannot enjoy him because he is not like him, and therefore cannot love him.

The case then comes to this. That were a wicked Man to be admitted into Heaven, with all his unsubdued Lusts and vicious Inclinations about him, he could not be happy there. Nothing there would please him. He would not like his Company. All the Glorious Objects around him would be offensive

(d) Col. iii. 10.

(e) Eph. iv. 24.

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Hence then it follows undeniably, that unless a Sinner's Heart and Temper be renewed and sanctified in this World, it is absolutely impossible in the nature of things that he should be happy in the other. Which evidently shews the great Importance of the Doctrine I am explaining, and how justly Scripture lays the greatest Stress upon it. Here then should we all lay it. For in order to be kept free from dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Religion, we must not only take care to come at the true Sense of Scripture Doctrines from Scripture itself, but take care always to lay the great Stress upon those

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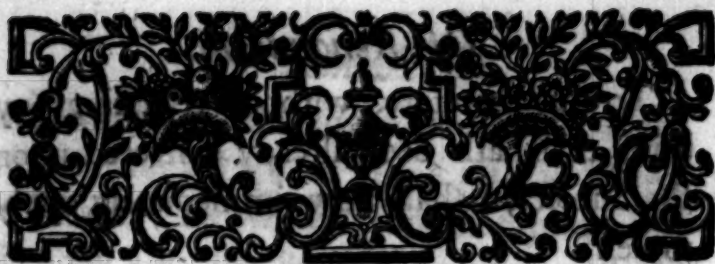
those

those Doctrines, on which we observe that to lay it. That we may not, as some are too apt to do, enormously magnify some Doctrines of small Importance, and depreciate others of much greater.

I should now proceed to the last general Head of Discourse, which was

V. To lay before you certain Precautions proper to guard the mind against some mistaken notions that have been received concerning this important Doctrine of *Renovation*.

But this, together with the Application of the whole, must be reserved for the Subject of another Discourse.

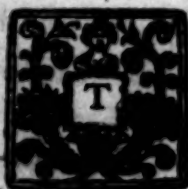


S E R M O N X.

Of RENOVATION.

GAL. vi. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature.



THE last thing I proposed in treating the Doctrine of Spiritual *Renovation* from these words was this, viz.

V. To lay before you certain Precautions proper to guard the Mind against some mistaken Notions that have been received concerning it.

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To this therefore, without repeating any thing that hath been already delivered upon the Subject, I shall now immediately apply myself.

This Doctrine, plain and important as it is, hath been by some much neglected, and by others much perverted. For by too frequent Observation we find, that it is not the Importance of a Doctrine that will guard it from neglect, nor it's plainness that will secure it from Mistake. Nay, the most important Doctrines are sometimes most neglected, and the plainest most mistaken. Such is the weak and fallible Nature of Man; and such the Danger of interesting our Passions and private Prejudices in matters of Religion, which is the unhappy Cause of all this. Therefore

PRECAUTION I.

Let us take care we be not led into Mistakes concerning the Nature of this spiritual Change, by the manner in which we may read or hear it described by Persons of different Sentiments.

And here two Extremes are to be avoided. Some are apt to speak of it in Terms too

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too high, and others in Terms too low.

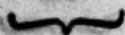
I. Some are apt to speak of it in Terms too high. By which I do not mean that they lay a greater Stress upon it than is necessary. For I do not see how that can well be done; or how any can speak of it in Terms of greater Importance than the holy Scriptures themselves do. But what I mean is, speaking of it in such dark, sublime and mystical Language as is hard to be understood; at least the clear and distinct meaning of which is not easy to be explained.

It is true, Scripture sometimes speaks of it in this figurative Stile, calling it the *new Creature*, the *new Birth*, and *new Man*, and the like, but then these metaphorical Terms are explained in other places by those which are much easier as *Repentance*, *Conversion to God*, *Love*, and *Faith that works by Love*; which plainly shews that by this *Spiritual Renovation* of a Man, is meant no more and no less than the entire *Reformation* of his Heart and Life.

And it may not be amiss here to observe, that the Word *Reformation* exactly answers to that which is more commonly used by Divines, *Renovation*. For properly speaking,
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to be *reformed* is to be *formed again*, so as that a person becomes quite another Man from what he was before. And just so much, and no more is to be understood by the word *Renovation*; the Man is *renewed*, that is, there is a happy and visible Change in him, and he is quite another Man from what he was. But let it be remembered that this Reformation must not be partial, or only in one particular or two of a Man's Conduct, (in which sense the Word is often used) for then the Idea it conveys is too low to correspond with that spiritual Change of which we are speaking; but it must be universal and entire, and then it means just the same thing, and comprehends all that is included in the Word *Renovation*.

2. Others are apt to speak of it in Terms too low.

Which can be owing only to a partial Acquaintance with the holy Scriptures; for though these sometimes speak of it in very plain and common Language, calling it *Repentance*, and a *turning to God*, *departing from Evil*, and *learning to do well*, yet it is always under Characters of such high Importance as sufficiently justify those strong meta-

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metaphorical Expressions by which it is at other times described.

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Do not say then that all that is meant by the Doctrine of Regeneration and the new Birth, which some Divines speak so much of, is only that a Man endeavour to reform and amend his Life; nor flatter yourselves that a few faint Purposes and feeble Endeavours after this are enough; this is not enough; the Change must be entire, in the whole Man, and carries in it so great a Difficulty in the present State of human Nature, as makes it apparent the Work must be Divine; and requires much Vigilance, Patience, and persevering Pains on our part. Our Lord commands us to *STRIVE to enter in at the strait Gate, for many will SEEK to enter in and shall not be able. Luke xiii. 24.* That is, for want of *Striving*. And really if we do but survey the degenerate State of the human Mind, and the Vices which have taken such fast hold of it, and the general Alienation of Mens Hearts from the great God and his holy Ways, it must appear that *that* Change which is wrought in them to make them like to God, and capable of enjoying the most pure and holy Being, must be

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be a very great and universal one; something much beyond a partial Reformation in the outward Conduct.

PRECAUTION II.

Let us take heed lest our care to avoid one of these Extremes do not drive us upon the other.

Nothing is more common than for Men who see their Mistake on one side, to imagine that they cannot recede far enough from it, till they run into one as great in the other; so apt is an undisciplined mind to move by Fits and Starts. Thus on one Hand, if we hear some speak of this Doctrine in too mean and diminutive Terms, let us not immediately give into the dark Mistical way of describing it, and skrew it up beyond all human Conception. And on the other hand, when we see it treated of in a way we do not like and cannot understand, let us not say that after all it means no more than a common Reformation. If some make nothing of it, let us not imagine there is nothing in it. Let us take the Word of God for our Guide, and we shall soon see it is not so mistical and miraculous a Matter

ter as some make it, nor so slight and easy a Business as others think it. We shall very plainly see wherein it consists, and not only that it is a very important and difficult Work, but for what reasons it is so, and in what manner the great Difficulty of it may be overcome.

PRECAUTION III.

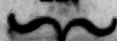
Let us take care of Mistakes and Extremes with regard to the *Manner* in which this great Change is wrought in the Heart.

I shall not dwell long upon this Head because I am fully persuaded, that the Reason why so few comparatively have experienced this great Change, is not owing to their Ignorance or Mistake of the manner in which it is effected, but to their wilful neglect of the Means by which it is attained. However it may not be amiss to mention a few particulars by way of Caution.

1. Think not that this Work is wrought instantaneously. It was so indeed in some persons formerly. As in the Jailor, the Thief on the Cross, and the Apostle Paul. But those Instances were extraordinary, and cannot

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not be alledged as Examples of the ordinary method of the Spirit's Operation on the Heart now. Under the present more settled Dispensation of the Gospel God hath appointed proper means to be used by us to that End; which he ordinarily effects by the use of those Means; and that leisurely, gradually, and imperceptibly; so that of many thousands of good Christians who have no rational Ground to doubt that *they are passed from Death unto Life*, perhaps not one of them is able to point out the precise time when that great Change was first wrought in them. And it is no matter whether they be or no, provided they can say as the Man did whom our Lord cured of his Blindness, *One thing I know, that whereas I was blind I now see.* John ix. 25.

2. We are not to think the Work is all our own. It is represented in Scripture as the Work of a Divine Hand; and if we duly consider the Greatness of it we can think it no less. *Can the Ethiopian change his Skin; or the Leopard his Spots? Then may ye who are accustomed to do Evil, learn to do Good,* Jer. xiii. 23. A diligent Use and Application of appointed means indeed is ours, but the Efficacy

Efficacy of those means or the Blessing that renders them effectual is God's, SERM.
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3. There is no reason for us to affirm (because it is a thing that cannot be proved) that the Grace of God works this Change in the Heart *irresistibly*; that is, by an over-bearing and uncontrollable Power, which a Man is not able to withstand. The Word of God no where saith any such thing. And why should we be fond of embarrassing Divine Subjects with new difficulties, by asserting things concerning them which we cannot prove from Scripture? All that the Scripture saith of it runs in this Strain, *Ye were sometimes Darkness, but now are ye Light in the Lord, (a).* Ascribing the Work in general to a Divine Hand. But that it is wrought in this irresistible manner, it saith not one Word, but indeed frequently intimates the contrary. It is said of the Pharisees, that *they rejected the Counsel of God against themselves, (b).* And that they *always resisted the Holy Ghost, (c).* So that some Operations of God's Grace and holy Spirit are resistible. And if that Grace which cannot be resisted be necessary to a Sinner's

(a) Eph. v. 8. (b) Luke vii. 30. (c) Act. vii. 51.

SERM. Sinner's Repentance, how can that be true
 X. which our Saviour saith, *Math. xi. 21. If
 the mighty Works which were done in Cho-
 razin and Bathsaida had been done in
 Tyre and Sidon, they had repented?* since
 irresistible Grace did not accompany those
 mighty Works; for if it did, *Chorazin and
 Bathsaida* had repented.

Besides, this notion is not only without
 any Scripture Foundation, but it involves the
 Subject we are upon in three very great Diffi-
 culties. For hence it will follow.

1. That no man repents upon Confide-
 ration and Choice, but 'by mere Force and
 Necessity. Which destroys the very Na-
 ture of Repentance.

2. That the Conversion and Salvation of
 those upon whom God does not work ir-
 resistibly, is impossible, which excuses the
 Impenitence of Men, by taking off the Fault
 from them, and laying it upon the Impos-
 sibility of the thing.

3. It puts the best Plea into the Mouths
 of Sinners at the Bar of God. viz. "That
 they could not repent because they were
 not irresistibly wrought upon." These are
 the hard Consequences which flow from
 this

this unscriptural Notion. But to proceed. SERM.

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4. We are not to think that Men are altogether passive in this Work, or only act as they are acted upon, and move as they are moved; and are wrought upon not rationally as free Agents, but mechanically as Stocks and Stones; and that they who are dead in Trespases and Sins, have no more Power to do any thing towards their Spiritual Life, than dead Bodies have to do any thing to recover their natural Life. This is a very dangerous Doctrine. Because it cuts the very Sinews of Repentance, and renders all human means vain and useless.

And it is worth observing that the Original or Foundation of most of those mistakes which Men imbibe concerning the manner, in which this great Change is wrought, lies in their over-straining the Metaphor used in the Text; where it is called a *new Creature* or a *new Creation*, only to set forth the Greatness of the Change, and to intimate by what Power it must be effected. But this some think is not all. "It must imply something further. That as the old "Creation was produced suddenly and in "an instant, by an irresistible Power, and

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“out it's own Co-operation, which was
 “merely passive, just so, say they, is this new
 “Creation or spiritual Change in the Heart
 “of Man produced.”——But why so?
 Where is the Necessity of this? The Subjects
 are different. The Subject of the old Crea-
 tion was inanimate Nature, which was fit
 to be wrought upon in this Way. The Sub-
 ject of this new Creation is rational Nature,
 to which this Method is not so well adapt-
 ed. And arbitrary Inferences from meta-
 phorical Expressions are no Proof, when un-
 supported by the Evidence of plain Scrip-
 ture.——“But in this manner some were
 “wrought upon in the Apostolical Age.”
 They were so. But we do not live in that
 Age. And if we expect to be wrought up-
 on in the same manner as some of them
 were, we may with as much reason expect
 the same Miracles now as they had then.

PRECAUTION IV.

Let us take care that we be not too preci-
 pitant and hasty in concluding that this great
 Change is certainly wrought upon us.

We have no reason to hurry on to this
 Conclusion. The Work is very great and
 difficult,

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difficult, as well as very necessary and important. Do not be impatient till you come to a full Assurance in this matter; which requires much time, experience and tryal. Instead therefore of confidently concluding that the Change is wrought and all the Danger over, it would be safer to persevere with Humility, Care, and Vigilance in the same Way in which it is to be expected; and in that way to seek after still brighter Evidence of it. Not that we are to disclaim or shut our Eyes against the Effects of God's gracious Operations in our Heart, or deny what he hath done for our Souls; but thankfully own it, and readily ascribe to him the praise of it, saying with the Apostle, *by the Grace of God I am what I am.* But it is good to be cautious, watchful and self-diffident. This will keep us humble, diligent and dependant. It is a better Sign to be modestly diffident than boldly confident. A Man that appears over-confident of the good State of his Soul is to be suspected of great Ignorance of himself. And what ever good Signs he may be able to produce of his Conversion, I am sure this is not one.

R 2

APPLI-

A P P L I C A T I O N.

The whole practical Application of this Subject may be comprised under these two Heads.

1. A diligent Examination of the State of our Souls, to know whether this spiritual Change be passed upon us or not.

2. The Direction and Management of our future Conduct, suitably to the Issue of that Enquiry.

1. Let us diligently enquire now into the State of our own Souls, whether we are new Creatures, whether we are renewed in the Spirit of our Minds, and born again to a divine Life, so as as to bear the Image of God which consists in *Righteousness and true Holiness*. For the right determining this grand Point, the following plain Directions may be of use.

1. Lay aside all your false Rules of judgment, and take the Word of God for your only Guide in this Affair.

Do not consider your former Practice as a Rule by which to judge of your present State. Your Life may be in part reformed, and yet your Heart not wholly brought over
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to GOD. You may have entered upon and made some progress in the right way, and yet not gone far enough. We read of some who were not far from the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet fell short of it, (*d*). The great Question is, not whether you are better than you have been; but, whether you are now what you ought to be; what the Word of GOD requires you to be; and what you must be, before you are fit for Heaven and Glory. And you can come to the Knowledge of this, only by comparing your Lives and Tempers with the Word of GOD, where alone you have the true way to Heaven and the only Qualifications for it laid before you.

Again, do not judge of yourself by the Character and Practice of other Men. If you be not sincerely good yourself, what will it avail that you are not so bad as others; and it is very possible that even in this your Self-flattery may deceive you. Though you be not so guilty as some others in your own eye, you may be more so in the eye of GOD. Because you may have had more Light and Knowledge, greater

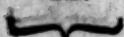
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Means

(*d*) Mark xii. 34.

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Means and Advantages, better Education and Examples, fewer Temptations, louder Calls, more solemn Admonitions from the Providences of God, and more serious Convictions from his Spirit, and yet sinned against them all. These things greatly alter the Case, and will all be taken into Account another Day. But however, suppose you be not so bad as they, will it be any Consolation to you to see others more intensely miserable than yourself? Or rather, what can be a greater Misery than this Reflection, that you was advanced to the very Gate of Heaven, and yet at last fell short of it; and are as much excluded thence as those who never made your profession of Religion or progress in it?

Let not these false Rules then deceive you. But come immediately to the grand Point. "Do I love the Blessed God with
"all my Heart and Soul? Can I part with
"every thing for Him? And do I hate Sin
"because he hates it?"

2. Do not judge of yourself by your occasional Frames, but by your habitual Temper.

Nothing

Nothing is more variable than the Temper of the human Mind; and were a Man to form a Judgment of himself by his particular Frames, nothing could be more inconsistent. Now he would place himself among the best, anon amongst the worst of Mankind. And indeed were he to continue long in either of these frames, he might justly do so. But these different frames of the Mind are owing to various external Causes. They are sometimes purely accidental, and sometimes merely mechanical; sometimes they arise from a sudden Alteration of our Circumstances, and sometimes (and that very frequently) from a Bodily Constitution; the different Texture and Motion of the Blood, or the different Quantity and Flow of the animal Spirits; and therefore can never determine our moral Character, or the inward, stated, habitual Disposition of the Soul.

A wise Man now will watch over these Variations of his mind; will endeavour to recover, improve, and retain his best Frames, and oppose, dismiss, and guard against his worst, but will judge of himself by neither. No, to form an impartial Judgment of ourselves, we must consider not what we are at

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particular times, but what we are in general; what is the prevailing Bent or governing Disposition of the Mind; whether the Heart be habitually set towards God or Sin, on this World or the other.

3. As we must not judge by our particular Frames, so neither by our particular Actions.

Because these take their Rise from the present reigning Disposition of the Mind. It is not a few good Actions that will determine a good Character, because it is possible they may not arise from a good Principle; and if they be not constant and customary, it is certain they do not. Nor is it a few bad Actions that will determine a Man's Character to be bad, because they may not arise from a predominant principle of Corruption in the Heart; and if they are unallowed and truly repented of, it is certain they do not.

Every Man is what his Heart is, or the governing Principle and Disposition there. If this be good, the general Course of his Actions will be so; if this be bad, so will be his habitual Conduct. For, as our Lord tells us, a good Man *out of the good Treasure of his Heart bringeth forth good things, and*
an

an evil Man out of the evil Treasure of his Heart bringeth forth evil things, (e); and that as naturally as a good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit, and an evil Tree bad Fruit.---In short, to judge only by particular actions and particular frames will lead us into a great Mistake both of our own Character and that of others. By this Rule we may pronounce *Felix* and *Simon Magus* to be good Men, and place *David* and the Apostle *Peter* among the worst, and ourselves among both.

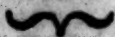
4. Another thing of great weight in this Case is, to attend carefully to the particular frame of Mind we are in when we are determining this great Point with ourselves.

For we are too apt to judge of ourselves according to the particular frame we may accidentally happen to be in at that time. If our Spirits are elevated we are apt to judge too well of ourselves, if depressed, too ill. And do what we can, the natural Flow of the animal Spirits which throws the Mind into these different Frames, will very likely put a strong Bias upon the Judgment, which shews the necessity of keeping the Mind

(e) Math. xii. 35.

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Mind quite even and sedate, whilst this important Point is under Consideration, and intirely open to the Verdict of Conscience and the Force of Evidence which ever way it turn.

Lastly. I would add as another necessary Rule in this case, to take care we do not judge too favourably of our State at last.

It is possible indeed that we may run into the other Extreme. But this is by far the most common and most dangerous, and therefore most deserves a particular Caution. The danger of judging too severely of ourselves is not near so great, nor the Effect so bad, as that of judging too favourably. For *that* hath a Tendency to make us more watchful, humble and careful, and only robs us of some of that Comfort which we might otherwise enjoy in the clear Evidence of our Sincerity; but *this* tends to Confidence, Carnality, Presumption and Sloth; the very worst Temper, and the most dangerous Situation the Soul can be in. Let us take heed then that Self-flattery do not betray us into Self-delusion.—And thus by care, and watchfulness, and humble Prayer to the Father of Lights, to make known our
Hearts

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Hearts to us, we may come to a comfortable
Assurance in this great Point, *whether we*
are passed from Death unto Life.

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And this grand Affair being settled, the
next thing in Course will be

2. The proper Management of our Con-
duct according to the Issue of this Enqui-
ry.

The Issue of this Enquiry, conducted
with that Impartiality and Care before di-
rected, will be either in the Negative, that
we have not as yet sufficient Evidence to
pronounce that we are in the number of
the *Regenerate*; or in the Affirmative, that
all things considered, we have good hope
that we are. Now this leads me to a parti-
cular Address to persons of each of these
Characters. And with this I shall conclude
the Subject.

1. After all this Enquiry, is your Consci-
ence forced to bring it's Verdict in the Ne-
gative?—To such I would say

1. That though your Case be dangerous,
yet it is happy for you that you are at last
come to this Conviction.

Be the Disease ever so bad, the Know-
ledge of it is one Step towards the Cure.

And

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And Blessed be GOD, the Disease, whatever Head it may have got, is not incurable. *For there is Balm in Gilead, and a mighty Physician there.* And if you will not persist in your past Obstinacy and refuse to be cured, your Soul may yet be safe and live for ever. However,

2. Lose no time, but set about this great Work immediately.

Delays in no case are more dangerous than in this. Put it not off to some more convenient time. For

1. No time can be more convenient than the present. The sooner you set about this great Work, the more time you will have for it. And it is an Affair of so much Difficulty, and with all of so great Necessity, that all your time will be little enough to secure a rational and unwavering Hope at last that the Work is surely done. Besides,

2. Whatever Difficulties or Objections you may make against setting about this Business now, they will all be increased by Delays. The longer you defer it, the more difficult will it be. It hath been deferred much too long already. And it is a mercy your Day of Grace is not yet at an End.

And

And for this Mercy you should shew your Thankfulness by setting about this great Work immediately. Are you not disposed to it? you will hereafter be less disposed *. Is the Work difficult? If You put it off, it will be more so. Are your sinful Habits strong? They grow stronger by Indulgence. And if your Conscience be not now kept awake, it's next slumber may be fatal. Can it ever be too soon to fly from Hell, and make sure of Heaven? — Besides,

3. Consider but the Ingratitude and Absurdity of deferring your Repentance till another time. *You are willing to continue in Sin a little longer, with a Design heartily to repent hereafter that you ever did so.* For a late Repentance, if true, will ever carry this keen Remorse with it; and the greatest Pang it will give the Soul, is that it hath been wilfully deferred so long already. *You will continue to love Sin a little longer, with a purpose to hate it hereafter, and to abhor yourself that you did not hate it sooner. You will continue your Enmity to God a while longer, in hopes that you shall hereafter love him.* What Ingratitude, what Inconsistency, what Non-

* Qui non est hodie, cras minus aptus erit.

SERM. Nonsense is this! He that continues in Sin
 X. with such a pretended Design to repent of
 it, seldom ever repents at all. Again,

4. How long is this most necessary Work to be put off? —“Till old Age” — Then, it seems, you will be willing to part with your Sins when you can no longer enjoy them. —“But you hope to repent sometime before.” But suppose you should not live to that time. What becomes of your Soul then? Do you see any thing more uncertain than human Life? How many does Death take away by Surprise? And are you sure of a timely warning? Nay, it is most likely that, when ever it comes, it will be unexpected, and when you promised yourself a longer time of Life. But

5. Suppose you should live to that time, and be then disposed in some degree to begin this great Work of Repentance according to your present Purpose, yet how do you know that God will then give you the Grace of Repentance and Conversion; that Grace which you had so often and so ungratefully rejected before, and without which you cannot turn to God with all your Heart? When you have turned a deaf
 Ear

Ear to all his Calls, how justly may he do so to all your Cries. And flatter not yourself that the Work can be done without him. It is by the Grace of God that you must be renewed to a Spiritual Life, if ever you are so. That Grace is now offered you. If you refuse it now it may never be offered more; and your Repentance may be impossible; which makes such procrastinations extremely hazardous.

I will not say that a Death-Bed Repentance is in itself absolutely impossible. For who shall set Limits to Infinite Mercy? But nothing can be more uncertain. And nothing more dreadful than a final Miscarriage. Who in his Wits would be willing to be shipwrecked in hopes of escaping on so slender a Plank?

Lastly. Suppose the most, and best, and very utmost that can be supposed, that your late Repentance purposely delayed should by the Grace of God be sincere, yet it is impossible you should know it to be so, or enjoy the Evidence of it's Sincerity. A Death-Bed Repentance though it be true, will always be attended with this dreadful Circumstance, that you will go out of the
World

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World in a total Uncertainty whether you shall be happy or miserable for ever. For having no Opportunity of proving your Repentance by the Fruits of it, though it be sincere, you can never be sure that it is so, but will have too much reason to suspect that it is only forced by fear.

Lay these things together, and let each of them have their due Weight upon the Mind, and they will be strong Inducements to set about this great Work of Repentance and a sincere return to God and his ways immediately. For, all these things considered, it is but too probable that if it be not done now it never will. And this may be the last time for ought you know that you will have so plain and pressing a Call to it; or that the Holy Spirit will give you any serious Impressions of the necessity of it, or any serious Inclinations towards it.-----And in what manner you are to set about this great Work, and persist in it, you have been already particularly shewn under a former Branch of this Subject. But

2. Is the Issue of this Enquiry a rational and scriptural Evidence that the prevailing turn of your Souls is towards God and Holiness?

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Then,

Be thankful but not secure.

Be watchful, but not discouraged.

Pray, but never faint.

Be thankful.—For sure none have greater reason to be so than you. Consider but what it is you are delivered from, what it is you are intitled to, and how freely the Grace of God hath made the difference between you and others; by which alone *you are what you are*. How many thousands are pursuing the broad way to Hell, while the Grace of God hath taken sure hold of your Heart, and keeps you in the right way to Heaven. Consider duly of these things, I say, and you will be thankful.—However, *be not secure*. You have many difficulties and many enemies still to conflict with. Your Strength is weak, your Temptations strong, your Hearts deceitful, and you know not what Trials are before you. Expect the hardest Encounters to be still behind: For it is very possible they may. A Christian's sharpest conflicts are often towards the close of Life, when his Strength is weakest. Therefore *be cautious and vigilant, gird up the Loins of your mind*, and remember where

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your Strength lies.—However, be not *discouraged*. For GOD maintains your Cause. Though you can do nothing of yourselves, you are *strong in the Lord*, and can *do all things through Christ strengthening you*. There is your sure Refuge in a time of Danger.—Therefore continue *instant in Prayer*. Seek your strength and your supplies from above. You will gain it not only by prayer, but in praying. For the frequent and devout Exercise of the Soul in that holy Duty will strengthen it; confirm and fortify it against Temptation; and in this way it is that pious Men enjoy the brightest hopes of Heaven.—And lastly, *never faint*. Count upon future Tribulations in your way to Glory. Expect them; and prepare to meet and bear them; but look beyond them. Set the heavenly Glory before your Eyes, and let that blessed Hope always animate your Heart. Often think of that never fading, never ending happiness which you are very soon to enter upon, and the frequent believing Views thereof will keep you from fainting in the way to it.

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*And now may the God of all Grace who
hath called us unto his eternal Glory by
Christ Jesus, after that we have suffered a
while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen,
settle you. To him be Glory and Dominion
for ever and ever. Amen.*

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S E R M O N XI.

The BENEFIT of a wise Obser-
vance of PROVIDENCES.



PSALM cvii. 43.

*Whofo is wife, and will observe thofe
things: Even they fhall understand
the loving Kindnefs of the Lord.*



O S E S the man of GOD, who
was admitted to the fingular
Honour of a personal Inter-
course with his Maker, *face to
face as a Man speaketh unto his Friend*, when
he was folliciting fome fpecial Token of the
divine Prefence, earneftly prayed that GOD
would *fhew him his Glory*. To which the
LORD

The Benefit of a wise &c.

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LORD replies, *I will make all my GOODNESS pass before thee, and I will proclaim the NAME of the LORD before thee, (a):* Plainly implying that his *Goodness* was his *Glory*, and that this is his *Name*, by which he desired especially to be known to the Children of Men; as it is more particularly expressed, *Ez. xxxiv. 5, 6. And the LORD descended in a Cloud---and proclaimed the NAME of the LORD---Jehovah, Jehovah is a GOD merciful and gracious (so it may be rendered) long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness.*

Now there are three open Volumes in which this glorious Name of the LORD is clearly legible; *viz.* The Book of Nature, the Book of Scripture, and the Book of Providence.

It is the last of these Volumes which the inspired Writer lays open to us in this Psalm of which my text is the concluding part; and which may not improperly be called, a *History of Providence in Epitome*. And it is worth observing, that he opens it to us for this very purpose, that herein we may read the *Goodness* of the LORD.

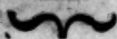
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To

(a) *Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.*

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To this he invites us in the beginning of the Psalm, *ver. 1. O, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his Mercy endureth for ever.* And after reciting several instances of Providence relative to particular cases, *viz.* Those of Travellers, Captives, Sick men, and Sea-men, he solemnly calls upon us all, at the close of each of these divisions of the Psalm, to celebrate the Mercy of God manifested in the marvellous Acts of his Providence in those particular Cases, saying, *O that Men would praise the Lord for his Goodness, and for his wonderful Works to the Children of Men, (b).* And with the same view he concludes the Psalm in the words of the Text. *Whofo is wise and will observe these things: Even they shall understand the loving Kindness of the Lord.* As if he had said, it is without all doubt the highest point of Wisdom to know God, and especially that part of his Name by which he desires in particular to be known, *viz.* His Goodness and his loving Kindness to the Children of Men; and the best way to attain this Wisdom is, seriously to recollect and

(b) Ver. 8, 15, 21, 31.

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and devoutly observe the various Ways and Dispensations of his Providence.

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These words then, you see, lead me to treat not so much of the Providence of God in general, as the Wisdom and Advantage of a careful attention to the Footsteps of it in particular, as opening to us new and marvellous Scenes of the divine Mercy and Goodness.

Here I shall presuppose the Certainty both of a *general* and *particular* Providence; or take it for granted, that the Providence of God not only *governs* and *preserves* the World in general, but that there are certain remarkable Interpositions of it in some particular cases, and that all even the minutest Events and Circumstances relating both to ourselves and others are under a divine Direction: This, I say, I shall take for granted, because we are taught it by an Authority not to be disputed, *Mat. x. 29—31.* and proceed immediately to what I chiefly intend, *viz.* To consider the *Wisdom* and *Advantage* of a devout Attention to the Providences of God, as affording to us new displays of his *marvellous loving Kindness*; the first implied in the former

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part of the Words, (whoſo is wiſe and will obſerve thoſe things,) and the other in the Words following (even they ſhall underſtand the loving Kindneſs of the Lord).

I. Let us conſider the *Wiſdom* of a ſerious and devout attention to the ways of Providence. *Whoſo is wiſe, and will obſerve thoſe things.*

Now theſe words plainly imply three things.

1. That they who are wiſe *will obſerve thoſe things*. That is, will carefully remark and take notice of the hand of GOD in the various Turns and Methods of his Providence. It is one part of the Character by which the Wicked are deſcribed; that *they regard not the Work of the LORD, neither conſider the Operation of his Hands, (c).* Though they live amongſt all the Wonders of Nature and Providence, and daily ſee therein the bright diſplays of almighty Power, and Wiſdom, yet they ſuffer them to paſs by unobſerved, unnoticed, unimproved; without making any ſerious Reflections upon, or learning any uſeful Inſtructions from them. But a wiſe Man will not act ſo; a good Man cannot. He

eyes

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eyes GOD in every thing; and devoutly owns his hand in all (and especially in all the extraordinary) Events that fall within his notice, whether of a publick or private, a personal or social Concern. He knows that GOD directs all his affairs, presides over all his Interests, and that he is always present with him, as certainly as if he were sensibly and visibly so; and therefore he can no more forget his heavenly Father's care and agency than a Child can that of his natural Father, who is leading him by the hand through the Paths of Danger, and helping him out of the Difficulties with which he is embarrassed.

And here let me just observe by the way, that though any considerable Event may befall us according to the ordinary Course of things, and we can easily enough account for it from the operation of natural Causes, yet the particular hand of Providence ought to be acknowledged therein as devoutly as if it befell us in a more extraordinary manner. For who has the Reins of these natural Causes in his hands? Is it not he who first established their respective course and order? and cannot he then easily direct their

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their Course and Concurrence so as to produce the most important and interesting Events? and when he does so, is not his hand to be acknowledged in the production of them as much as if they were brought about in a more extraordinary way? In short to produce important Events by the general Laws of Nature seems now to be an established method in the System and Government of Providence. Miraculous Interpositions we are not to expect. And not to own the hand of Providence in the most concerning Events, merely because they are produced by the Concurrence of natural Causes, is to degenerate into downright *Scepticism*, * and at once, with the *Epicureans*

* The *Sceptics* (so called from the Greek word *σκηπτικός*, which signifies to look into or consider) were a Sect among the ancient pagan Philosophers; the followers of *Pyrrho*, who flourished at *Athens* about 350 Years before Christ, (whence they are sometimes called *Pyrrhonians*) whose distinguishing Tenet was, that all things were doubtful or incomprehensible, and therefore that it became a wise Man to keep his mind in a continual Suspense and give his assent to nothing: Which involved in it this plain Contradiction, that they were very certain nothing was certain. For if nothing was certain, how came they to be certain of that? Hence a perpetual Doubt, Hesitancy or Suspension of Mind under the plainest Evidence proper to determine it, is still called *Scepticism*.

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reans, * to banish all Providence out of the World, SERM.
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2. The words may further imply that a religious Observation of Providence is the way to improve in true Wisdom. *Who is wise? even he will observe those things* (as the Words may be rendered) and by observing those things he will become still wiser.

Many useful Lessons may be learned, by a careful attention to the Conduct, and by proper Reflections on the Issues, of divine Pro-

* The *Epicureans* were another antient Sect of Philosophers, the followers of *Epicurus* (coteremporary with the former) who held several distinguishing principles, the most notorious of which were these four. 1. That it was unworthy the Majesty and inconsistent with the Tranquillity of the Gods to concern themselves with human affairs. Which is the notion referred to in this place. 2. That there was no future state after this Life. Which two notions gave their Philosophy all the bad effects of downright Atheism. 3. That the *Summum bonum* or chief happiness of Man consisted in the Enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Hence those who are most addicted to these kind of Gratifications are sometimes called *Epicures*. 4. That the World owes it's present Form and Order to a casual and lucky jumble or concurrence of eternal and indivisible *Atoms*. Hence this is sometimes called the *Atomical Philosophy*; which was sufficiently rallied by *Cicero*, and deservedly exploded by all the sensible Men among the *Pagans*; and indeed contains an Absurdity which nothing but *Transubstantiation* can exceed.

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Providence. Hereby many of it's Mysteries will be opened, and much of it's Darkness removed. For though the ways of Providence are oftentimes perplexed and intricate, and some of them at present altogether inexplicable, and we must wait to see the whole Scheme complete before we can see the Wisdom of some particular Parts of; yet I cannot but think that a good deal of it's present Obscurity is owing to our want of a careful attention to it's Course, Connexion, and Tendency. We are apt to be too partial and contracted in our Views, too hasty and precipitant in our Judgment; we do not give our Observations a due Scope and Extent, or consider the connexion which one Series of Events has with another; or how necessary the Concurrence of several less Events, (which appear of themselves dark and discouraging,) is to bring about one great and glorious Design; or what good ends those subordinate Events answered, and were designed to answer in the mean time. For that which now appears to a Christian the most grievous Evil, may be necessary to fit him for the greatest Good. And not only the History of *Joseph's* Life but that of every

every Man's own, would furnish him with many Observations of the same kind, if he were but rightly disposed to make them. SERM.
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The Word of God, we commonly say, is the best Comment upon itself. The same we may say of his Providences. By thus comparing them one with another we shall discover a Beauty, Wisdom, and Goodness in them, which escape the notice of a superficial Eye; and *thus* may we learn the most important Instructions from them. The Book of Providences though it lies continually open to us, will not make us at all the wiser (no more than the Books of Nature and Scripture) unless we understand it; nor can we understand it unless we take pains to learn it; but when once well learnt and understood, it will make those surprising Discoveries, and point out those visible marks, of divine Energy, Wisdom, and Goodness, which low and unobservant Minds see nothing of. In a word, an habitual Inattention to the ways of divine Providence robs us of one of the best means of improving in the best Knowledge.

3. Another thing which seems to be implied in the Words is, that it requires much wisdom

SERM. wisdom and prudence to make right Observations on the ways of Providence, and to put a proper Construction upon them. *Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, that is, whosoever shall wisely observe those things, even he shall understand the loving Kindness of the Lord.* We must observe Providences very wisely, attend to them very carefully, consider them very diligently, and apply them very cautiously, or we shall not only lose the Advantage here proposed, but be led into much Mistake and Folly instead of Truth and Wisdom.

A misapplication of Providence, is no less common than a misinterpretation of Scripture: By both Men of weak and injudicious Minds often do themselves more harm than good. But what then? Does it follow from hence that they are not both of them very useful Books? Are not the best things capable of being abused? Or must we say that because a misunderstanding of them is attended with very bad Effects, therefore a right understanding of them is attended with no good ones? No, sure. The Contrary is most certain. And the proper Inference from hence is, that we should take the great-

er care to understand both of them better. A misconstruction of Providence may, perhaps, have as bad Effects as a misconstruction of Scripture, and both produce a deal of Mischief: But a true Knowledge of them is an indispensable duty and unspeakable happiness for all that.

It was the Saying of an antient Divine, (d)
 "That the Christian who is well read in
 "the History of Providence carries a Body
 "of Divinity about him." But we must not forget that in this Book, as well as that of Scripture, there are *some things hard to be understood*. Which should excite all our diligence and caution in this kind of Study, that we may not, like conceited, half-learned Novices, grow vain of our Knowledge, and fancy that we see much further and understand much better than we really do.

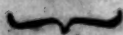
— It may not be amiss therefore to lay down a few plain Rules, which may serve to direct us in this kind of Study, and keep us from Mistakes when we are perusing the Book of Providences. And

1. Let us fix in our Minds a full and lively Persuasion of the *Doctrine* of Providence

(d) Mr. Trap.

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dence: or be firmly assured of the reality and certainty of an over-ruling and governing Power that reaches to all Events. As Christians we cannot doubt of this, much less deny it. But what I mean is such a deep and affecting Impression of this upon our minds, as will constantly dispose us to eye the Hand of God in every thing. This is previously necessary to all that follows.

2. We must attend to divine Providences with *Diligence*; observe them with a steady and accurate Eye: Not dismiss them with a transient Glance, but carefully and deliberately survey them, and contemplate them in all their Circumstances; and deposit them faithfully in our Memories to be reviewed and applied hereafter.

3. We must be *cautious* in our application of Providences, and in our determinations concerning their immediate Design. The unfathomable Depths and Mysteries of divine Providences render this Caution exceedingly necessary. For *God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as ours*. And especially should we take care how we interpret afflictive Dispensations as sent in a way of Judgment; in which some persons are

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are easily led into Mistake, and that on the worst side. To prevent which we should always remember those words of our Saviour, Luke xiii. 2, 3. *Suppose ye that these Galileans were Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things; I tell ye, nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.*

4. Let us *patiently* wait the Events of Providence before we judge. As we should not be rash and confident so neither should we be hasty and precipitant in our judgment of providential Dispensations. For both these do frequently betray us into wrong Judgment.

5. We should carefully compare *one Providence with another*. Because (as I before observed) they are oftentimes the best Comment upon themselves.

6. Would we rightly understand the Book of Providence we should carefully compare it *with the Book of Scripture*: Between both which we shall often see a most beautiful Harmony; the Events of the one verifying the Predictions, Promises, Threatenings, and Observations of the other; which will greatly confirm our Faith and improve

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our Knowledge in both, and prevent our drawing any Conclusions from the Providences of God which are contrary to the plain Principles of his Word.

7. If we would understand the Providences of God let us *obey the Calls* of them.

8. Frequently *pray for Direction* in this matter, and for *that Wisdom which is profitable to direct*.

Such Wisdom is required in *observing these things*, and thus to observe them is a happy means to have that Wisdom increased. I now proceed

II. To consider the great Benefit and Advantage of such a prudent and devout Attention to the Providences of God; particularly as it will open to us new discoveries of the divine Goodness. This is implied in the latter part of the Words—*even they shall understand the loving Kindness of the Lord*.

This Proposition now I shall endeavour

1. Particularly to explain. And then

2. Answer an Objection which some may very possibly make against the Truth of it.

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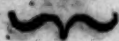
XI.

I. I am to explain the Proposition in the Text. Which may refer either to public and general, or to particular and private Providences.

1. It may refer to public and general Providences. And then the meaning is that by such a wise, discreet, judicious and careful Attention to the ways of Providence in general, we shall soon come to be convinced of this Truth, that *the whole Earth is full of the Goodness of the Lord*; that *his tender Mercies are over all his Works*; that his Bounties fill the Earth, *even as the Water covers the Sea*; that with a Father's care and kindness he provides for his whole Family, dispensing to every Branch and Member of it, from the highest to the lowest, those things which are needful and proper for them; and that in such measures and proportions as he in his infinite Wisdom and Goodness sees most conducive to the Beauty Order and Good of the Whole. Such a careful, judicious, wise and extensive observation on Providence, as before described, will go a good way to solve many Mysteries that appear in it's Government both of the natural and moral World; and throw light upon those Scenes of it

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which to a careless and inadvertent mind appear altogether Darkness. This is intimated in the words of the Prophet (so similar to those of the Text) *Hof. xiv. 9. Whoso is wise and he shall understand these things, prudent and he shall know them ; for the ways of the Lord are right.* That is, he shall know and understand that they are so ; and shall see the Footsteps of God's Loving-kindness in many Providences which appear to others the marks of his Displeasure. But

2. The words of the text seem to have a more immediate Reference to private and particular Providences. And then the sense is this. Let any person of a pious and contemplative Mind but sit down and seriously recollect and revolve the ways of God to him, the various methods of his Providence and Grace, and carefully observe the Tendencies and Connexion of things, and he will be able to discover such a series of divine Mercy, and Goodness, and so many plain instances of God's loving-kindness to him, as cannot fail to fill his Heart with the warmest Gratitude ; and which without such a careful observance of Providences he could never have thought of.

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1. Upon such a review of things we shall see many Providences to have been in mercy which once seemed to have been in Judgment. Nothing is more common than for some Christians (like Infants that know not the Designs and Views of their tender Parent) to look upon some Dispensations as the marks of God's displeasure, which are really the Fruits of his Love to them. Thus good old *Jacob* was mistaken. When Providence was working the way for the Preservation of himself and his family, he, not being able to discern the Design, Tendency, and End of things, grew very sorrowful and disconsolate, and cried out, *all these things are against me, (e)!* whereas they were all for him, all for his Good; and paving the way for his unthought of Advancement and Felicity. Had he recollected this afterwards in the time of his Prosperity, (as perhaps he did) he would soon have retracted his mistake, saying, " How unsearchable are thy
" Judgments, O Lord! How poorly do we
" judge of thy ways! and whatever be the

T 3

" appear-

(e) Gen. xlii. 36.



"appearance of things, great is thy Loving-kindness to them that fear thee."

Christians often find their greatest Afflictions to have been their greatest mercies, by the *peaceable Fruits of Righteousness* which they produce; and see reason upon their bended Knees to adore the Loving-kindness of God in those very Dispensations which they once deprecated as the heaviest Judgments they imagined could befall them. And many more such mysterious Instances of the divine Goodness shall we doubtless discover hereafter, when we shall be able to take a more comprehensive view of things. Which should teach us to suspend our Judgment of many Providences till we see the Issues of them: And in the mean time to remember that the God of infinite Goodness is our Father and Guide, and that *his ways are not as our ways*.

2. By such an attentive view of the ways of God towards us we shall be able to see that God's merciful Dispensations contain in them many more mercies than we ever before took notice of. If our Contemplations descend deep into divine Providences we shall discover rich mines of Mercy there which

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which a superficial Survey could never descry. And we lose half the Sweetness of our mercies by not attending to the several Circumstances which greatly enhance them; such as their Nature, Number, Duration, and the Suitableness and Seasonableness of them: By a careful Consideration of all which we shall be able to discern much more of the Loving-kindness of God in them than we can otherwise be ever sensible of. And in this view we should never forget to take in our unworthiness of them, and our unthankfulness and unfruitfulness under former Mercies: Which will set the Compassion and Loving-kindness of God to us in the strongest Light.

O how many Mercies do we enjoy which we never think of! and how many have we enjoyed which we have long forgot! what a debt of Gratitude for all these to the Loving-kindness of the Lord lies still unpaid! And how can we pay it unless we are sensible of it? And how can we be sensible of it, unless we thus recollect and remember the mercies we have received, with their various Circumstances which discover and magnify the value of them. Mer-

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3. By an accurate Observance of Providences we shall not only find our Afflictions to have been much smaller and our Mercies much greater than we apprehended, but we shall be able to discern a most gracious Scheme and Chain of Providences in our favour, and how fitly one was adapted to prepare us for another. And by taking the divine Dispensations in this Connexion we shall not only see a most beautiful Harmony between them, but a just and gradual Tendency to answer the purposes of the divine Love and Mercy.

This, I doubt not, is one peculiar Entertainment of the glorified Saints in Heaven, which we hope hereafter to enjoy with them, and which we may even now enjoy in proportion to the present low state of our intellectual Powers. And indeed it is impossible to discern either the Beauty, Wisdom or Goodness of the divine Providences without viewing them in their proper Subserviency and taking them in this Connexion. And this, notwithstanding our present darkness and impotence of Understanding, may easily be

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be done, if the Mind be serious and attentive, so far as to make many wonderful and unthought-of Discoveries of *the Loving-kindness of the Lord.*

So much then may suffice to explain the Proposition in the Text. *¶* I come now

2. To remove one Objection which may possibly be made to all this. Which in short stands thus.

Objection. “ How is this Observation
“ to be reconciled with Fact? That God is
“ infinitely merciful and good is not to be
“ doubted. But this does not seem to be
“ so easily discoverable from the present state
“ of things and conduct of Providence.
“ Are there not a thousand things in the pre-
“ sent State both of the natural and moral
“ World which we can by no means recon-
“ cile with our Ideas of infinite Mercy and
“ Goodness? Things grievous to every tender-
“ hearted merciful Man to think of, which
“ the meer dictates of Humanity strongly
“ prompt us to remedy, but we cannot; and
“ these not only all permitted under the Go-
“ vernment of God, but many of them in-
“ flicted by his immediate Hand! And then,
“ that so many of the very best of Men, the
“ most

“most humble and dutiful of all God’s
 “Children, should be exercised with severe
 “rest Sufferings, as if they were quite de-
 “serted of their heavenly Father’s care!
 “What can we say to this? And what Obser-
 “vations on Providence or Reflections on the
 “ways of God can help us out of this Maze
 “or unfold this dark and uncomfortable
 “Mystery? Which when we consider we
 “are ready to say—*is the Mercy of God*
 “*clear gone for ever? Hath he forgotten to*
 “*be gracious? O where is the Loving-kind-*
 “*ness of the Lord?* Now to this I answer

1. The Psalmist does not say, nor can any Man presume to think, that there are no inexplicable Mysteries in the ways of Providence; or that there are not many things in the course of the divine Dispensations which we are not able at present to reconcile either with the Goodness or Wisdom of God. It is most certain there are many such Mysteries in his providential Conduct. And it is impossible that it should be otherwise considering the infinite difference between his Views and ours. But,

2. All that the Text affirms and I have been endeavouring to prove is, that they

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they who make the wisest and justest Observations on Providence will make the plainest and largest Discoveries of *the Loving-kindness of the Lord*: And may discern traces of Love in those events which to others appear tokens of Anger. And

3. I must observe, that this Objection itself seems to be founded in a good measure, on a want of that just, wise, comprehensive and judicious Attention to the Dispensations of Providence which has been before described. Because were all those mercies which appear to be mixt with the most afflicting Evils, taken into the Account and put into the opposite Scale, the Objection would lose half it's weight. And

Lastly, The other half of it will be lost only by distinguishing between real and apparent Evils, by observing the Connexion and Tendency of things, by looking upon them in the view of Futurity, and by considering the necessary State and Condition of things in a degenerate World.

1. We should not think there is so much evil in the World as we do, if we could but distinguish between real and apparent Evil. For the *latter* is often mistaken for the *former*.

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mer. Nay some are apt to call Good, Evil. Every thing is not evil which we call so, or think so; and therefore is not to be set down to that Account. Otherwise the most prudent and tender-hearted Parent may be charged with unnatural Cruelty, who makes his Child submit to many things for it's good, and which are good, but which to the Child itself appear to be evil.

2. If a thing be really evil (that is, *natural* evil) but connected with and necessary to a greater Good, even that, though inflicted on the best of Men, is no imputation to the *Loving-kindness of the Lord*. Without such a Connexion and Tendency indeed it would be so. But our not being able at present to see that Connexion and Tendency does not at all affect the Case: because he that dispenses these things does see it, though we do not. We must not think that God wants Loving-kindness because we want understanding. The more Wisdom we have, the greater will his Mercy appear.

3. We should see the greatest part of the Objection against the Loving-kindness of the Lord to vanish, did we but accustom

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tom ourselves to look upon things in the view of Futurity : That is, as relative to another State. Those things which may appear evil to us with relation to this World or the present State, may appear good when taken in a larger view, and as they concern creatures designed for immortal Happiness in the other World. And in truth, the greatest part of our Mistakes concerning Providence, I imagine, take their rise from hence ; we confine our views too much to the present World, and look upon things only in their relation to the present Life. But this is to judge by a false rule, and to look through a wrong Medium. And no wonder then that we make a false and mistaken Judgment. But let us not judge hardly of the ways of God purely because we mistake them.

Lastly, We should consider that the greatest part of the real Evil there is in the World arises from the Circumstances we are in as Creatures born with depraved natures in a degenerate World. Therefore in the present State of things some evils and miseries are unavoidable, without an omnipotent Interposition to controul the natural Course of things ;

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things; which the Mercy and Power of God could do without doubt, and so clear the World immediately of all the Evil there is in it. But this his infinite Wisdom thinks a method not fit to be taken with reasonable Creatures who are capable of and placed under moral Government.

These things then duly considered, I think, intirely take away the force of the forementioned Objection. Or at least are a great Confirmation of the point of Truth I have been proving (with which indeed the Objection hath but little to do) *viz.* That what ever Evil there is in the World, the most diligent, wise, and accurate Observers of Providences will make the greatest Discoveries of the divine Mercy and Goodness. Or *whosoever* wisely and attentively consider them, even they shall understand, more than others, the *Loving-kindness of the Lord.*

What remains now is to make a proper Improvement of this Subject. And

I. We hence see one reason why the Mysteries of divine Conduct appear to us at present so inexplicable.

Not but that there always will be depths of Wisdom in the ways of God not to be fathomed

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fathomed by finite understandings. But the reason that many of them appear so repugnant to the Perfections of his nature, is owing not always to the Weakness but oftentimes to the Intention of our Minds; or a non-observance of the Nature, Designs, Tendency, Connexion, and Issue of divine Providences: Upon which if we accustomed ourselves to make wise and proper remarks (and especially if we compared them with the Declarations of the divine Word) we should soon strike out a Scene of Light from those Providences which at present seem to be involved in total Darkness.

2. From what hath been said we learn one happy Expedient to increase our Love to God.

To love God more, and to be sensible of a growing regard and devotion to that great and blessed Being is without doubt the warm desire of every pious Soul. But the way to love him more is to be more sensible of his Loving-kindness to us. And how we are to be so we have now been particularly informed. If we wisely ponder and carefully consider the various ways of his Providence to us, we shall *understand the Loving-kind-*

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kindness of the Lord. This will open to us much wider and more affecting displays of it than we ever had or could have without it: And will set the peculiar Mercy, Compassion, Kindness, Grace, Benignity and Goodness of our heavenly Father to us in so strong a Light as cannot fail to touch all the Springs of Gratitude in our Heart, and excite the warmest returns of Love.

Especially if to the ways of Providence we add the Methods and Operations of his Grace (which ought to be recorded with equal Care) we shall see the Loving-kindness of the Lord to be great and marvellous indeed. It was this that so readily kindled the flames of Devotion in the Heart of the royal Prophet, and we need not doubt but it will have the same effect on ours. But how is it possible that they should love God who seldom think of him, or his Works, or Word, or Ways? Therefore

Lastly, Let the Consideration of the vast Advantage which attends this Duty effectually excite us to put it immediately into Practice, and make it part of our daily Devotion.

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It is a point of great Wisdom; and we know not what we lose by living in the neglect of it. When our minds then are best disposed, let us set ourselves to recollect and reconsider the most memorable Turns of Providence in all the various Stages of our Life, and devoutly acknowledge the Hand of God that hath so comfortably conducted us through them all, and preserved us unto this day. And if upon such a solemn review of Life we see some dark and mystical Scenes which we cannot so easily reconcile with our heavenly Father's Goodness, or if we may be under any such at present, let us conceive him saying to us as our Saviour in another case once said to his Disciples, John xiii. 7. *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*

And when we revolve those Providences which evidently shew the *Loving-kindness of the Lord* (as doubtless we can easily recollect many such) let our Souls break forth into the most grateful Praises in the Language of the inspired Psalmist—*Great are thy tender mercies to me O LORD. How manifold are thy mercies to me, how great is the sum of them! Mercy and Goodness have followed me*

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all my days. What shall I render unto GOD for all his Benefits? I will bless the LORD as long as I live, I will sing Praises to my GOD whilst I have a Being. I will abundantly utter the Memory of thy great Goodness, and sing of thy Righteousness.—Bless the LORD, O my Soul!



SER -



S E R M O N XII.

Christian MORALITY, a Sermon to
young PEOPLE.

PHILIP iv. 8.

*Finally, Brethren, whatsoever things
are true, whatsoever things are
bonest, whatsoever things are just,
whatsoever things are pure, what-
soever things are lovely, whatsoe-
ver things are of good report, if
there be any Virtue, and if there
be any Praise, think on these things.*



THESE words are a short Sys-
tem of Christian Morality. And
let it be remembered, that mo-
ral Duties when performed by
gospel Motives, and from right Principles,

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become pure Christianity. For practical Christianity differs from mere Morality, only as a perfect Rule differs from a defective one, not in *kind*, but in *degree*: It is Morality improved, enlarged, and refined, exalted to a nobler Height, enjoined by a plainer Rule, enforced by stronger Motives, and directed to a higher End. And such Morality is not only ornamental but fundamental to Christianity. And therefore I apprehend there needs no Apology for recommending it to them who bear the name of Christians. If there did, I should not desire a better than this Example of the Apostle *Paul* himself.

In improving this fruitful Passage of Scripture then for your Instruction (and particularly for the Instruction of young People, for whose Benefit this discourse is principally intended) I shall

- I. Consider what is contained under the several Branches of Duty which the Apostle here recommends.
- II. The manner wherein he recommends them. And
- III. I shall after this enforce the Practice of them by some suitable Motives.

I. I am to consider what is contained
under the several Branches of Duty
which the Apostle here recommends.
And

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1. The first thing he turns our Thoughts
to is *Truth*. *Whatsoever things are true,*
think of those things.

Truth may be taken here either as *mental*
in opposition to Error, or as *practical* in op-
position to Deceit : and may stand to signi-
fy either right Opinion, or upright Heart ;
implying that we should take care not to be
deceived ourselves by false Colours, and that
we do not deceive others by the same ; that
before we judge of things, we should strip
them of all Disguise, and affect none our-
selves ; but be willing to see, and to be
seen, in a proper Light : as we would not
be deceived, so we should not dissemble.

Now this Precept, I would observe, is
with peculiar Propriety directed to persons
in youthful Life, who for want of right
thought are very apt to fail in both these
respects. That is to say 1. They are too
apt to be deceived in their Opinions and
Judgment of things ; to espouse Error for

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Truth,

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Truth, to be moved by outward Appearances, to look only on the Surface of things, and to judge at first view. And this Precipitance of Judgment and Volatility of temper, so common in that Age, betrays them into many a mistake, which, for want of being rectified in time, do sometimes take deep root in the Mind, and by degrees grow up into invincible Prejudice. And 2. As persons of that Age are very liable to be deceived, so they are sometimes very apt to deceive; to make bold with Truth, either by flatly denying it, to excuse or conceal a fault, or by misrepresentation and false colouring to make it appear in a wrong Light: A Vice, which, if early contracted and long indulged, will not only be extremely detrimental to their Interest and Reputation, but will for certain exclude them from the favour of their Maker, who is *a God of Truth* and knows their Hearts.

There is another way in which the Law of Truth is sometimes violated, and that is by putting on false Appearances; when persons affect to appear in the World different from what they really are, by personating a Character not their own, in order to make

a Sermon to young People.

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make others believe they have what in truth does not belong to them. This when carried to excess is no better than Hypocrisy: and at best is but a weak Affectation, the mark of a little Mind; and sinks their Character extremely in the judgment of all the Wise and Good. Only endeavour to be as good as you ought, and then you need never be ashamed of seeming to be what you are.

Truth then, my young Friends, is the first thing you should be concerned about, as the chief Ornament of your Character; Truth, in Heart, Lip and Life. Endeavour that all your Sentiments, Words and Actions be conformed to the Laws of Integrity and Truth, and *Integrity and Uprightness will preserve you (a)*; will preserve you in a good degree from the Snares and the Slanders of the World; or however, will preserve your inward Peace and Self-enjoyment, and secure to you the approbation of God and your own Conscience, which is more to be esteemed than the Friendship of all the World without it.

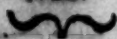
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(a) Psal. xxv. 21.

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2. After Truth the next thing you are to regard is *Honesty*; which is near of Kin to it: *Whatsoever things are honest*: For there can be no *Honesty* without Truth, nor *Dishonesty* without Falshood.

But though our English word, *honest*, commonly stands in opposition to *fraud*, yet the original Word *εἰλικον*, which we thus translate, properly signifies *decent*, *grave* and *modest*: and stands in opposition to every thing that discovers a Levity, Boldness or Indecency, in Words, Conversation, Apparel or Address: As a much surer way to conciliate esteem and respect than those light, assured and forward Airs which some put on to gain it. The favour of Men, like public Fame, is of that delicate nature, that it often flies from them that pursue it, and pursues them that flee it. If it be courted with too ardent a passion, it is surely lost. Do but deserve it, and you will certainly have it, without the fatigue of that Pursuit: at least you will have something much better, *viz.* The cordial Esteem of a few worthy Friends, which is more to be desired than the Applause of the giddy Multitude.

Let

Let me however just observe, that there is a manifest difference between a morose and an easy Gravity of temper and manners. *That* is no less contemptible than *this* is amiable. An affected Stiffness is always unengaging, sometimes shocking; especially if it be mixt with a rigid and censorious Temper; and is often the Vail of secret Pride and much Conceit. An unreserved Freedom and Openness of mind and address is no way inconsistent with that sober, grave, and decent Conduct the Text recommends, but very ornamental to it.

And this I conceive is sufficient to let you see what is to be understood by the second Branch of Duty recommended in the Text. The next is a more comprehensive one, viz.

3. *Whatsoever things are just.*

The word does not always signify strict Justice: For that is not always proper to be executed; but that which is right, fit, and equitable, all things considered. There is a Decorum, Fitness, and Aptitude in things, to which we should carefully attend under all Events and Circumstances: and these are as various as the nature of those

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those Events; and are easily determined by common Prudence. In a word, we cannot have a better Comment on this Branch of Christian Morality than the Maxim our Saviour himself hath given us (which for it's Excellency hath obtained the Character of the *Golden Rule*) viz. " To do to others " that which, upon a change of Circumstances, we should reasonaby expect they " should do to us (b). "

Justice is giving to every one their *Due* ; and that not only in point of civil Right, but of moral Conduct; *Tribute to whom Tribute is due, Fear to whom Fear, Honour to whom Honour.* And every Man, in whatever station of Life he be, hath some such Claims upon us. And these we are to look upon as Debts which in Justice we are bound to pay him, according to the Character he bears, or the relation wherein he stands to us. For instance, to our Superiors we owe respect, deference, and duty; to Inferiors, condescension, beneficence and love; the Wretched have a claim to our Compassion, the Poor to our Charity, the Miserable to our Help, and all Mankind to our Benevolence.

(b) Mat. vii. 12.

lence. And to deny them any of these Dues when it is in our Power to pay it, and Prudence does not forbid, is in effect to deal unjustly by them. A due regard to this general Rule and our Saviour's Comment upon it would bid fair to regulate many Enormities visible amongst Men that arise purely from an Inattention to the Duties of social Virtue. And to consider the strict Observance of these relative Obligations as *a point of Justice*, would answer these two ends in particular, *viz.* It would suppress an arrogant and haughty Spirit in Superiors, and an abject servile Temper in Inferiors; when the former demand more than is due to them, and the latter give more than is due from them. For there is a decent Dignity to be preserved in a state of Inferiority. And persons in this condition have as great a claim to the Candor and Condescension of those above them, as they in higher Life have to the Respect and Submission of those below them. And if Superiors shew nothing of that condescension and kindness which is due to their Inferiors, they forfeit that respect which is due from them: *Forfeit* it, I say, so far as that they cannot reasonably expect it; though the obligations that lie

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lie upon Inferiors to pay it, be still the same. For however others may misbehave towards us, we are still to behave in a proper manner towards them: We are in Justice bound to it. And what that just and right behaviour at all times is, a due consideration of the Character and Relations we bear in Life will soon inform us.—But so much for this Branch of Duty.

4. The next is Purity. *Whatsoever things are pure.*

This may stand either for *Sincerity* (the purity of the Intention) in opposition to Hypocrisy, or *Chastity* (the purity of the Body) in opposition to Obscenity, or *Holiness* (the purity of the Soul) in opposition to all *Sin* in general which pollutes it. In this latitude must we take the Precept here enjoined, as referring to all those things which tend to purify and refine the Soul, to cleanse it from the pollution of Sin, exalt it's Taste and raise it above the attraction of sensual Delights: Commanding us to beware of the danger of carnal Gratifications, to keep the 'Flesh still subservient to the Spirit, and the Appetites and Passions in due Subjection to Conscience and Reason; and never to suffer the lower powers of our Nature to usurp the

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the place or take the Lead of the higher. For our Appetites and Passions, being originally designed for Service and Subjection, if they once gain the mastery, will (which is common to all servile natures) most surely play the Tyrant. Which should therefore put us on our guard against their first In-croachments.

But to proceed; Truth, Sobriety, Justice and Purity, are the four cardinal Christian Virtues; which comprehend in them almost all the rest. However lest we should not so clearly see the Connexion of these with the other moral Virtues of Christianity, the Apostle, instead of mentioning every one in particular, subjoins four more general Heads which undoubtedly comprehend them all. And therefore he adds

5. *Whatsoever things are lovely, — Think on these things.*

Whatever you see amiable in the Characters, Tempers, Life and Deportment of others, and which will make you so in the Eyes of others, *that* endeavour to imitate, be *that* the Object of your daily Ambition and Pursuit. How many lovely Qualities do you see in several you have the Happiness to be acquainted with, for the sake of which

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which you cannot help loving them ! Study to make those Qualities your own, and they will render you as lovely. For the surest way to be esteemed and loved is, to imitate others in those good Qualities for which you love and esteem them. And to be esteemed by the best, the wisest, and most discerning part of Mankind, is indeed worthy your Ambition. But though it may lawfully and laudably aim at this, yet, methinks, I would not have it rest here. It ought to rise still higher. And therefore let me add.

Whatsoever things are lovely IN THE EYES OF GOD think of those things. Let your Ambition stop at nothing less than the divine Friendship, to be pleasing and amiable in the Eyes of him who made you.

“ And what must I do (you will say) to “be happy in the Love of God ? ” — To this important Question I will return this plain and familiar Answer. — What would you do now, if you sincerely desired to gain the Love of your Parents and Friends ? as I know you do. Would you not endeavour to do all you can to please them ? readily obey their Orders, submit to them, learn

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learn what they teach you, and do what they would have you? Would you not seek to them for what you want, confide in their care of you, acquiesce in their Will, and follow their Directions? I know you would: and I hope you do. And therefore your Parents and your Friends love you. Why, do but behave thus towards God, your heavenly Father, the Parent of your Soul, and he will love you too: will love you as much, nay much more than your earthly Friends and Parents can do. And if you have no Father, He will be a Father to you; nay, much better then ten Fathers.

He hath given you very plain and particular Directions in his Word how you are to please him and appear lovely in his Eye. I shall just mention two or three of them, to give this Discourse a more evangelical Turn, and then proceed.

1. If you would please God, you must love his Son, the Lord *Jesus Christ*. Because he came from Heaven to save you; and laid down his own Life to save you.

2. You must love God, because he sent his Son to save you: and therein hath shewn

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shewn himself a kind Father indeed ! and hath done more for your Souls and your Happiness in another World, than your dearest Friends can do for your Bodies and your Happiness in this World. Herein he hath shewn that he loves you even more than they do. And therefore surely you ought to love him as much as you do them. Nay, it is he that hath given you those good Friends and tender Parents ; and therefore you should love him for that.

3. Love your Bible, and God will love you. For it is his Word, and Message to you, to shew you how you are to please him, and gain his favour, and be happy in it for ever. Endeavour then carefully to learn the true meaning of it, and to practise what you know.

4. Take care you do not offend him by any known Sin, or by acting contrary to your Conscience.

Lastly, When you have sinned, humbly beg his Forgiveness for the sake of *Jesus Christ*, and implore his Grace to help you, and in dependence on that resolve to sin no more ; and he will pardon you (for

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he is a very merciful God) and will still love you. SERM. XII.

These things are pleasing to God, and amiable in his sight. Thus may you become lovely in his Eyes as well as in the Eyes of Man. And the Love of God will make you happy for ever.—But to proceed

6. *Whatsoever things are of good report, think of these things.*

That is, whatever you would be glad to have others say of you, or whatever may redound to your Credit or Reputation in the World, have a regard to those things. Not that we need be over-anxious or solicitous about this, so we do but approve ourselves to God and Conscience; yet to be intirely indifferent to common Fame is a certain sign either of a very indolent or very dissolute Mind. *A good name (Solomon tells us) is better than precious Ointment, and rather to be chosen than great Riches (c).* And though it ought not to be sought for it's own sake, nor be our chief Motive in the Prosecution of Virtue (for they are not inseparable Companions; some have Virtue without Fame, others Fame without Virtue) yet a

VOL. I. X good

(c) Ecclef. vii. 1. Prov. xxii. 1.

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good name founded in Virtue is so desirable an Acquisition, that no wise Man will despise it: But in some cases will take it as a Rule to guide his Conduct, by abstaining from certain things, which though lawful in themselves, yet may be of *ill Report*, or may give occasion to others to think or speak evil of him.

It is true, common Fame is oftentimes a common Lyar. But one would not chuse to lie at the Mercy of a common Lyar; but would rather endeavour that he shall say nothing to our Disadvantage but what will redound more to his own. In a Word, the Credit, the Influence, the Satisfaction, the Interest, the Usefulness, that often flow from a well-established Reputation, are sufficient to induce a wise Man to make it the Object of his Desire, though not of his ultimate Pursuit. / We may say of Virtue what the Miser says of Money.

— Seek Virtue, Virtue still;

And then let Honour follow, if it will.

And therefore the Apostle adds

7. *If there be any Virtue.* Implying that we should desire a good report and seek Reputation no other way.

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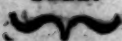
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The Apostle, you see, is not so extremely nice as some over-scrupulous Christians are, as to be afraid to use the Word, *Virtue*, because it is of heathenish Extract. Some have been ready to blame their Ministers for using the term, who ought to have blamed the Apostle *Paul* first. For *Virtue* (as I observed before) when exercised according to the christian Rule, from christian Principles, and upon christian Motives, differs nothing from Gospel-Holiness. And in this sense every christian Writer is supposed to use it.

The meaning of the Precept is, whatever Virtue we see in others we should endeavour to make our own. Some excel in one, and some in another. In some we observe a warm spirit of Devotion; in others exact Prudence and Wisdom: Some we admire for their serious and conscientious Temper; others for their strong Sense and clear Judgment: Some we esteem for their Fortitude and Zeal; others for their Equanimity and Self-command: Some set us an admirable pattern of Meekness under Affronts, and of Patience in Afflictions; in others we see exemplified all the rules of Moderation

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and Temperance: Some engage us with their Affability and Sweetness of Temper; in others we see all the charms of Benignity and the most intimate Friendship: How delightful and pleasant is the Converse of Some? How instructive and improving that of Others? From one we may learn Charity, from another Humility, from one Discretion, and from another Piety. These Virtues do not flourish alike in all. They are Flowers that delight in different Soils: Out of which we should be continually gathering some, in order to make the sweetest Collection to adorn and perfume our own Bosoms. And in a Word, whatever Virtue shines forth in a conspicuous degree in any person, that should we immediately make the Object of our Imitation.

Lastly, The Apostle concludes all with adding—*If there be any Praise.*

That is, whatever other things there may be that are commendable or praise-worthy, and not comprehended under the foregoing Heads, *think of those things.* In some Characters you may observe certain inexpressible Decencies, some things extremely graceful and pleasing, that are not so easily expressed

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as discerned, but are no sooner discerned than admired; take those things into the Embellishment of your Character, and make those agreeable Qualities as much as you can your own.

These, my young Friends, are the several Features of that lovely Picture which the Apostle hath drawn for you, and presented you with in the Text, by which to form your moral Character; and by copying which you will become lovely in the sight both of God and Man. And having dwelt so long upon it, I shall in a few words dispatch what now remains. Therefore

II. I am now briefly to consider the manner in which the Apostle recommends to you these several Branches of christian Morality.

He bids you *think of these things*. That

I. Carefully consider the native Excellencies of these Virtues in themselves; and see with what a lovely Lustre they shine in others; and how bright a Constellation they

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form when placed together. View them in their intrinsic Worth, and happy Effects.

2. Think of them so as to *reason upon* them. So the original Word properly signifies (*e*). Look not only at their outward Beauty, but their inward Constitution. Examine into the Reason and Foundation, the Original and Importance of them. Consider how necessary they are not only to adorn, but to form and finish the christian Character. Do not despise them, because some People affect to speak lightly of them. For however they may slight them, most certain it is that they cannot be true Christians unless they practice them. For that can never be Religion that is separated from Truth, Sobriety, Justice and Purity. These things are of eternal and indispensable Obligation. And though they entered into the best part of the Religion of the heathen World, as discoverable by the Light of Nature, yet they are incorporated with that of the Gospel, or rather are the very Basis and Foundation of it; and as such are recommended, improved and enforced by *Jesus Christ* himself.

3. Con-

(*e*) Ταῦτα λογίζεσθε.

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3. Consider them in their Effects: How much they improve and embellish, dignify and exalt the human nature; and guard it against every thing that is base and mean and sordid. They form a strong Barrier against the solicitations of Sense, the temptations of Satan, and the allurements of the World, at the same time that they fit and prepare you for the Enjoyment of him who is the eternal Source of all Good.

Lastly, Think of these things so as to practise them. Make them the Objects of your daily care and study. Hide this fruitful Scripture not only in your memory but in your heart. And frequently go over in your mind these several Branches of christian Duty, as they have been now briefly explained; and resolve in dependence on divine Grace (for which you should daily pray) to transcribe them gradually one by one into your own Character, by imitating those in whom you see them severally exemplified.

And to excite you hereunto (which was the last thing I proposed) I proceed now

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III. To recommend to you two Considerations by way of Motive: both which are mentioned by the Apostle *Paul* himself; one in the verse preceeding, the other in the verse following the Text.

1. The first is this, that in all the future Troubles of Life this is the way to secure to yourselves the truest *Peace*. You are entering my young Friends, upon a stormy Sea; on which you must expect in time to meet with rough Weather and many a threatening Tempest. Be this your Anchor, this your Ballast, and it will keep you even and steady and peaceful: not only as it will calm your own Passions, and defend you against the Hurricane of other Men's, but as it will give you a Peace of Conscience, a divine Peace; and the unspeakable Satisfaction which arises from a Sense, that, through *Jesus Christ*, your peace is made with God. And thus the peace of God, which passeth all Understanding, shall keep your Hearts and Minds through *Christ Jesus* (f). And

2. It will secure to you the Favour, the Presence, and Blessing of God, in every future

(f) Philip iv. 7.

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ture Condition and Relation of Life in which his Providence may place you. And who would not be glad of such a Friend and Companion through the dangerous Ways of Life, to comfort, direct and help and guide and strengthen us? Possibly the time may come (though I hope it never will) that he will be the only sincere and cordial Friend you have in the World. However, be assured that he is more to you and can do more for you than all the Friends you have. And he is a Friend *at hand*, when they are *afar off*: And can give you at any time the peace and ease and comfort you want, when they cannot. For he is the God of Peace: And if you will attend to the Exhortations which have now, in much tenderness and affection, been given you, that God of Peace *will be with you* (g): be with you, to protect and bless you, to direct and help you, to preserve and guide you through all the future uncertain Scenes of Life, till He receive you to himself in a World of perfect and everlasting Peace.

I shall now conclude with putting the Precept and the Motive together? beseeching you, my dear young Friends, for your
own

(g) Ver. 9.



own sakes seriously to consider the Importance of both. Therefore *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any Virtue if there be any Praise, think of these things. And the Peace of GOD which passeth all Understanding shall keep your Heart and Mind in Christ Jesus; and the GOD of Peace shall be with you.*





S E R M O N XIII.

The BLESSEDNESS of the MEEK.



MATH.

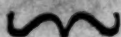
Blessed are the Meek: For they shall inherit the Earth.



HO would not wish to be one of those whom *Jesus Christ* himself pronounces Blessed? And who would not desire to have those Characters and Dispositions, on which his Blessings are here pronounced? Be our Condition in the World what it will, and let the Men of the World think of us what they will, those whom Christ blesteth are blessed indeed.

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indeed. Happy for us then, if we can discern in ourselves any of these characteristic Properties of his Disciples, to which these Blessings belong!

And some of them perhaps we may discover more easily and with better Evidence than we can others. Let us at present examine ourselves upon this *Meekness* of Spirit mentioned in the Text, and which stands as the Object of our Saviour's third Beatitude.

In treating of which, I shall endeavour

- I. To shew you what this Meekness is.
- II. What is implied in the Blessing pronounced upon it.
- III. To make a practical Improvement of the Subject.

I. I am to shew you what this Meekness is, upon which this Blessing is pronounced.

It is observable that the three first Qualities on which our Saviour pronounced his Blessings, (*Humility, Mourning, and Meekness*) seem to bear a near Affinity to each other. However if you compare them with their

their Opposites, they will appear to be very different. For Humility is opposed to *Pride*, Mourning to *Insensibility*, and Meekness to *Passion*.

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Meekness then is that mildness or gentleness of Temper which renders a Man unwilling to resent Affronts and Injuries, and ready to forgive them: And is that virtue and disposition of mind which of all others shone most eminently in the Temper of our blessed Lord himself. And by our readiness to imitate him herein (as he requires) is our christian Character best distinguished. *Moses* was a Pattern of meekness, but *Jesus* was Meekness itself. And without the reality of this Disposition in some degree, it will be hard for any to make out their Interest in Christ as their Redeemer, or their Relation to him as his Disciples. Let us distinctly consider each of these parts of the Virtue just mentioned.

I. Meekness is that mildness and gentleness of Temper which renders a Man backward and unwilling to resent Affronts and Injuries.

This is that Branch of Meekness which is sometimes called *Longanimity* or *Long-suffering*.

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fering. And is one of those excellent Properties of Charity which the Apostle mentions in those Words, 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 7. *Charity suffereth long; beareth all things, endureth all things; and is not easily provoked.*

It is also one branch of *Patience*; which consists of two things, viz. Being slow to Wrath under the Affronts we receive from Men, and submissive under the Afflictions we receive from God.

Charity and Meekness hope the best of all things; dispose a Man to make a great many good-natured Apologies to excuse a seeming Affront; or, if it cannot be excused, to put the most favourable Construction upon it. Pride and Passion put the worst Gloss on a suspected Fault that can be invented, which immediately irritates and inflames the Mind; humility and meekness admit the very best it will bear, which keeps it cool, sedate and calm, till the whole truth be known; and then proportions the Resentment to the nature and circumstances of the case.

And indeed the great Art of preserving a Self-possession in all those cases wherein we are in danger of losing it lies here; in checking

ing the first beginnings of Passion, or stifling the first Motions to Anger. For, like Fire, (to which it bears a near Resemblance) the least Spark may soon be blown up into an unconquerable Flame; or like Water, the smallest Breach, if neglected, may increase to an overwhelming Inundation. For, as *Solomon* observes to this purpose, *the beginning of Strife is as when one letteth out Water; therefore leave off Contention before it be meddled with, (a).*

2. Meekness consists not only in a backwardness to resent Offences, but in a readiness to forgive them.

Passion is a revengeful, Meekness a forgiving Temper. And let it be remembered as an important Maxim of Christianity, that though there are certain Injuries and Indignities which we may in a proper manner resent, yet there are none so great but what we must forgive. For if we deny Forgiveness to Man, our Saviour hath told us plainly we can expect none from God. *If ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your Father forgive your Trespases, (b).* And in the Prayer which he hath given us we are

(a) Prov. xvii. 14. (b) Mat. vi. 15.

are taught to seek for pardon only on this Condition.

It is not for sinful Mortals to be implacable towards their Fellow-sinners. "But the Affront is so outrageous, the Injury is so notorious." Is it greater than what God bears from you? — "But it is so often repeated." Do not you repeat your Affronts against Heaven much oftener? — "But he that hath done me this Injury is never the better for my forbearance and lenity." Why, whilst you indulge such vindictive Sentiments against your Brother, you shew but too plainly that this is exactly your own case with respect to God; and that you are but little the better for all his Goodness, Lenity and Long-suffering to you.

Meekness then is a forgiving Temper; It disposes the Mind to pass by and overlook little Injuries, and to forgive the greatest. Therefore the Apostle puts these together; Col. iii. 12, 13. *Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) Bowels of Mercy, Meekness, Long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.*

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These then are the two characteristic Properties of Meekness, it renders the mind backward to take offence and ready to forgive it. *To err is human, to forgive divine.* — And how divine, how great, and god-like a Temper this is, will more fully appear when we come to view it in the Character of *Jesus Christ*, who was himself the most perfect Pattern thereof. But

II. Let us now consider what is implied in the Blessing pronounced upon it.

Blessed are the Meek, for they shall INHERIT THE EARTH. The words are taken from *Psal. xxxvii. 11.* *But the Meek shall inherit the Earth: And shall delight themselves in the abundance of Peace.* The words as spoken by the Psalmist did probably refer to a long and peaceable Possession of the promised Land. But as applied by our Saviour for the Encouragement of his Disciples, they must of necessity have a different Reference and another Meaning. Which is what we are now to enquire into.

The sense cannot be, that the Meek shall always have the largest Share of earthly Pos-

essions. This might really be a Disadvantage to them; it is what Christ hath nowhere promised them; and which in fact we find not to be true. But the meaning must be, that they shall have the surest Title to that portion which their heavenly Father thinks fit to allot them; shall live in the quietest Possession of it; shall have a more real Enjoyment of it, more Comfort and Peace with it; and ordinarily shall live longer to enjoy it than those of the contrary Disposition. Thus *Godliness has the Promise of the Life that now is.*

1. They have a surer Title to that portion of earthly good things which God thinks fit to allot them than others have.

For they hold it by the surest Tenure in the World, *viz.* The immutable Promise and Covenant of God, and under the watchful care and powerful protection of his wise and gracious Providence. As no one can *pluck them out of the Hands of God*, so neither can any one pluck out of theirs, that which God thinks fit they shall possess.

What God hath promised them is *Food convenient for them*; a Supply suitable to their Circumstances and Necessities. And there-

therefore whatever they enjoy not, or having once enjoyed are deprived of, does not come under that notion. God hath promised that *no good thing will be withheld from them*, and that is enough. If they have not what they think good, they may therefore conclude, that either it is not good *in itself*, or that it is not good *for them*. That which is really good and convenient for them (and God knows better than they do what that is) shall be secured to them; and the particular portion which Providence allots for them *as such*, none shall be able to take from them.

2. Another sense of the Words may be that the Meek shall inherit their part of the Earth, whatever it be, with more peace and quietness than others.

Thus it is expressed in the Psalm out of which these words are cited; the Meek shall inherit the Earth and *shall delight themselves in the abundance of Peace*. *Who is he that will harm you*, says the Apostle Peter, *if ye be followers of that which is good*, (c)? Who but a Man of the vilest Character will delight to give trouble to one who is universally known to have an Aversion to

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(c) 1 Pet. iii. 13.

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all Strife and Contention? The best-natured indeed is capable of being abused; but it is only by the worst of Men: And the Meek meet with better usage even from these than others generally do.

3. The Meek have a greater Enjoyment of, and more Comfort in what they possess than other Men ordinarily have.

He never wants a Feast who is of a meek and contented Spirit. For *better is a little with the Fear of the Lord, than great Treasure and Trouble therewith, (d).* There is not that Mutiny in his Bosom which distracts the Hearts of violent Men, and imbitters all their Sweets. Together with peace of Conscience there is peace between his Reason and Passions. And above all, a happy Testimony of Peace between him and his God. A Testimony, in which he often rejoices, and which keeps his Soul in *perfect Peace.*

Lastly, The Meek shall ordinarily live longer to inherit the Earth than they do who are of the opposite Temper.

In this sense *Inheriting the Earth* is opposed to a Person's being quickly swept away from

from it by Death. *Psalm xxxvii. 9, 11.*
Evil Doers shall be cut off, but they that wait
on the Lord shall INHERIT THE EARTH,
Yet a little while and the Wicked shall not be,
but the Meek shall INHERIT THE EARTH.

This may have it's Accomplishment in a natural Way. Meekness has a kindly Influence on the Constitution; sweetens the Blood and animal Spirits, by preserving their easy motion and even flow; and so is a Friend to Health, and a Means of long Life. Few passionate and fretful People attain to a very advanced Age; the Meek often do. Nor is this verified only in a natural way, but sometimes by the special Order and Appointment of Providence.

Thus much may suffice to explain the Virtue mentioned in the Text, and the Blessing pronounced upon it. What remains is

III. To make a practical Improvement of the Subject. And

1. Then let us take care to distinguish between Meekness as it is a natural Temper, and Meekness as it is a divine Virtue.

Y 3

Indeed

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Indeed where ever it appears, and from whatever it springs it has a sweet and amiable Aspect, throws a lovely Glory round it, and is a sure Mark of a great and ingenuous Mind : Yet still there is a material difference between these two, to which if we do not attend we shall be very ready to mistake the one for the other. The one is maintained and cultivated out of Conscience towards God, and therefore is regulated by religious Principles ; the other (which is the effect of nature) is sometimes irregular and blameable in it's Operations. Meekness as a divine Virtue does not forbid our warmest Resentments against Sin, nor prevent us from being angry at those things at which we know God himself is. *Jesus Christ* himself was angry upon such Occasions; whose just Indignation was more than once excited by the Pride and Hypocrisy of the incorrigible *Pharisees*. But Meekness, as it proceeds only from nature (like it's Laws) acts the same way upon all Occasions. It makes a Man backward to take Offence when he really ought, and when Conscience and Duty to God call him to it. He will not sacrifice his Repose to the Honour
of

of the Meek.

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of God, or the Interest of Virtue and Religion. He is inoffensive, harmless, gentle, mild, courteous and forgiving as the meekest Christian, who has this Grace in the highest Perfection; yet he cannot resent upon a proper occasion or in a proper manner, an affront offered to God as the Christian does, and as *Jesus Christ* himself did. So that although nature may sometimes give that which Grace does, yet Grace often gives that which Nature cannot.

Now this Distinction is proper to be remembered on two Accounts.

1. That they who are inclined to a mildness and gentleness of Temper may be able to judge whether it be indeed this virtue of Meekness or not; and may not mistake a *natural Temper* for a *christian Grace*.

To be sure it is the most happy natural Temper that can be; because it bears so great a Resemblance and approaches so near to one of the greatest Graces or Virtues of Christianity. And therefore is that which they who possess it have great reason to be thankful for. But still it is no Christian Virtue if it proceed not from a

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Christian Principle, if it be not exercised from Conscience towards God, or at any time cannot discountenance that which is contrary to his Honour.

2. This Distinction ought to be remarked for another reason, *viz.* That they whose natural Temper is the reverse of that last mentioned, and is inclined more to the passionate and severe, may not rashly conclude they have nothing of this christian Virtue in them, if they have it not in that Degree, and to that Perfection which others have whose natural Temper inclines them to it.

It requires a great degree of Grace to correct the Faults of a natural Temper; but though this be the strongest and most uncontested Evidence of the Reality and Power of Religion, yet it is weakness and want of Judgment to conclude that we have no Grace at all if it do not immediately operate this way. A Man that takes no care to regulate his Passions and rectify the Faults of his Temper, to be sure has no Religion at all in reality. Yet a truly good Man may sometimes take a great deal of pains in this way with very little

little Success. Religion does not immediately make a fiery and passionate Man meek and gentle as a Lamb. If after many fervent Prayers and painful Efforts he finds, that by the Grace of God he hath gained some Ground of his head-strong Passions; that he hath a better way to manage them, and has them more under Command than formerly; that to pass over and forgive Injuries, is not so difficult to him as once it was; and that he is more offended at the Affronts and Indignities that are offered to God and Religion, than at those that are offered to himself; I say, if a Man finds these things in him, he may and ought to conclude that he is not altogether destitute of this christian Virtue of Meekness. Nay, it is possible that such a one may possess it more as a *christian Virtue*, than many of those do in whom it shines more conspicuously as a natural Temper. But the more he improves in it amidst all the Disadvantages under which he labours, the more he adorns Religion and discovers the Efficacy of it upon his Heart and Temper.

3. How contrary are the Maxims of Christianity to some of the most current Notions of the World.

Blessed



The Blessedness

Blessed are the Meek and Mourners, says our Saviour; Blessed are the great and prosperous, says the World. Let a Man but abound in Wealth and shine in Station, though his Temper and Character be just the reverse of this which our Lord pronounces blessed, and he will not only be felicitated but envied too by a misjudging World. In the account of many, a meek Spirit is nothing but an abject and mean one; and not to resent all Affronts and Injuries, they think, is the way never to be without them. But the Wisdom of our Saviour, which was the Wisdom of God, judged otherwise, And so does the reason of Mankind too, when inlightened and freed from the Influence of partial and ill-biassed Passions. For indeed what can be more reasonable and lovely than from a true greatness of Mind and a compassionate Sense of human Frailty and Folly, to overlook Affronts and lesser Injuries, rather than by violent means to right ourselves, to disturb the Peace of Society, inflame our own Breasts with vindictive Sentiments, and multiply Contentions without cause and without end?

Such

Such a Temper was looked upon by some of the wiser Heathens with Contempt, (e). And is it not a shame for those who pretend to go far beyond them in Practice and Knowledge, to come so far short of

(e) ————— Quippe minuti

Semper et infirmi est animi exiguique Voluptas

Ultio.

Juv. Sat. 13

Revenge is always the pleasure of a weak and little Mind.

Hence Women are more apt to be angry than Men, sick People than healthy, old Men than those who are in perfect Age and Strength, and Men in pain than those who are in Peace.

Plutarch of Anger.

Ἡ ἐν τότε ἐγγενομένη φαντασία ἡδονὴν ποιεῖ, ὥστε ἡ τῶν ἐνυπνίων. The fantastic pleasure of Revenge is like that of a Dream.

Arist. Rhetor. Lib. ii. C. 2.

Quo quisque est major, magis est placabilis Ira;

Et faciles motus mens generosa capit.

Ovid.

Πρόχειρον ὃ ἐν ταῖς οργαῖς, ὅτι ἐχθρὸν τὸ θυμῷ δαῖαι ἀνδρικόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρῶτον καὶ ἡμερον, ὥστε ἀνθρωπικότερον, ἥτοι καὶ ἀρρενικότερον. When you are inclined to anger, remember, it does not become a Man to be in a passion; that Meekness and Gentleness is not only a more human, but a more manly Temper.

M. Antonin. Lib. ii. Sect. 18.

Γὰρ τὸ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τὸ χαλεπαίνειν. It is a sign of Weakness to be angry.

Id. Lib. ii. Sect. 9.

So Seneca, Quanto humanius, mitem et paternum animum præstare peccantibus? How much more human is it to be mild and merciful to them that offend you?

De Irâ. Lib. i. C. 14.



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De Irâ. Lib. i. C. 14.

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of them as to give into the false ways and notions of the World, so contrary to true Christianity and sound Philosophy? The moral part of Christ's Religion is an Improvement on the Heathen Ethics, or the Perfection of their Morality, and advances further than the light of Nature ever taught them to go. Let us not dare then to dishonour the Religion of *Jesus* by thinking and acting in such a manner as they, who had only nature's Light for their Guide, would be ashamed to do.

4. From what hath been said we may learn to fix in our minds a just and right Notion of this Christian Virtue for the Direction of our future Practice.

As it is not a mere easy natural Temper, so neither is it a bare political Prudence; as it is not a Sheepishness, so neither is it a Cowardise of mind. It is consistent with true Valour, nor is it an Enemy to all kind of Anger.

It must be owned that some Expressions of our Saviour concerning the practice of Meekness, taken in a literal and unlimited Sense, will not only have a strange sound but a very absurd meaning. e. g. Those in
Mat.

Mat. v. 39—41. I say unto you resist not evil: But whosoever shall smite thee on the right Cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any Man will sue thee at the Law and take away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak also; and whosoever shall compel thee to go a Mile, go with him twain. Therefore instead of understanding these Words in a literal and unlimited sense, we must put a moral and qualified Construction upon them, suitable to the nature of proverbial Sayings. The meaning then is no more than this, that in general we must avoid whatever is an Indication of angry and vindictive Spirit, on all Occasions shew a meek and forgiving Temper, and that in some Circumstances it is better to put up with two Affronts than to resent one. And as this may be done without resigning up all our Rights, and bowing down the Back that whoever will may ride over us, so we are allowed for our own peace and preservation to do every thing that is not contrary to the prevalence of a meek and quiet Spirit.

Lastly, Let us by the Grace of God resolve and endeavour for the time to come, to make this part of the Christian Temper
our

SERM. our own; and study to grow more and
XIII. more perfect in this excellent Virtue.

Among many things that might fitly be urged to excite you to this Virtue, I shall at present only recommend it to you from three Considerations.

1. The Example of *Jesus Christ*.
2. The immediate Advantage it will be of to ourselves.
3. The Honour it will do Religion.

1. Let me recommend it to you from the Example of our divine Master, whom we profess to imitate.

I might indeed lay before you many illustrious examples of this Virtue to be found amongst mere Men. And might mention *Pericles*, *Aristides*, *Socrates*, *Irenæus*, *Ephraim* the Syrian, among the Antients; and Arch-Bishop *Cranmer*, Judge *Hale*, Mr. *Elliot*, and others among the Moderns: of whose excellence in this particular Grace, many remarkable Stories are told, and many signal Instances produced. But the brightest Displays of this Virtue in them compared to the Lustre with which it shone in the Example of our Lord *Jesus Christ*,
are

are but as the morning Dawn to the Meridian Sun.

The younger part of his Life he spent in a meek Subjection to the Authority of his Earthly Parents. And by growing in this lovely Quality, *he grew in favour both with God and Man.*

When the Offices of his public Ministry rendered him more exposed to the Envy and Malice of his Enemies, how often did he peaceably withdraw himself from the Violence of their Rage?

When he was wounded in the tenderest part, his moral Character, and calumniated by the Pharisees as a Glutton, Drunkard, and Friend and Companion of Sinners; he meekly replied in his Defence, that they mistook the Case; for he did not take such persons for his Companions but his Patients, and attended them not as their Associate, but their Physician.

Nay, when he was slandered as a Magician, a Sorcerer, and a Confederate with the Devil; by whose help his Enemies affirmed he wrought his Miracles; a Charge as false and malicious as Hell itself could invent; how did he resent this? Why even this did not

move

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move him to wrath. But he coolly argued the Case with them; shewed them how impossible it was that such a thing should be true; because it supposed the Devil to lend a helping Hand to overthrow his own Kingdom. Besides, they never imputed this to any of their own nation whom they supposed to have wrought Miracles before him, and why should they impute it to him, (f) ?

How meekly did he bear with the Weakness, Ignorance, Prejudices Perverseness, and wrong notions of his own Disciples! the mistaken Zeal of *John*, the Self-confidence of *Peter*, the Incredulity of *Thomas*, the Ambition of the two Brothers, and the Contentions of them all !

In the last Scene of his Sufferings, how did he behave? The blacker that Tragedy was, the brighter did this Virtue shine in it.

When the Ruffians came to apprehend him in the Garden, he readily told them, he was the Person they sought. Nay, when the Traitor himself approached him, and with a Diffimulation deep as Hell saluted his much injured Master with the air of

(f) Mat. xii. 24--27.

of Friendship, his much injured Master, who knew the perfidy of that Wretch's Heart, gave him only this gentle Rebuke, "*Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a Kiss!*"

When *Peter*, to shew the Abundance of his Zeal, cut off the right Ear of *Malchus*, *Jesus* instantly wrought a miracle to cure it; and desired that the one would put up the Affront, and the other his Sword; and so prevented the fatal Consequences that might ensue from so rash an Action, (g).

When he saw the armed mob pressing upon him, and thirsting for his Blood; *are ye come out against me (says he) as a Thief, with Swords and Staves to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But now are the Scriptures concerning me to be fulfilled,* (h).

When one insolently struck him on the Face in open Court, though it was an inhuman Insult, a violation of all Law and Decency, with what a meek dispassionate mind did he receive that indignity! "If I have spoken amiss, the Court is sitting, inform

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"against

(g) John xviii. 10, 11. (h) Mat. xxvi. 55.



“ against me ; if not, what occasion had you
“ to strike me ? ”

When *Pilate* condemned him after he had publickly declared him innocent, He did not so much as complain of the Injustice.

When he was abused by the Rabble, insulted with Mock-majesty, he said not a Word ; but *was led as a Sheep to the Slaughter*, meek and dumb as a Lamb. *When he was reviled, he reviled not again.*

When he was hooted, railed at, buffeted and spit upon, he was silent ; *when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously.*

When they mocked his dying Groans, and loaded him with the most inhuman Insults, whilst he was under the extremest Tortures human nature could sustain, not one impatient Word escaped him.

Nay his very last Breath he spent in a fervent Prayer for his murderers. His last words were (not like those of *Zechariah*, 2 *Chron.* xxiv. 22. When the Jews slew him for telling them their Faults, *the Lord look upon it and require it ;* but) *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.* Luke xxiii. 34.

And

And having thus done what he could for
their Pardon, he died under their malice.

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No,--Never was there such a Pattern of
meekness as that divine Person who, in the
Text, said *blessed are the meek*. Never did
any one possess this Virtue in the same De-
gree of Perfection. Never did any one
meet with so many and severe Trials to ex-
ercise it; and never did any one set such an
Example under them as he did.

Let me beseech you then, my Friends,
by the Meekness and Gentleness of Christ, to
imitate him therein, and whilst I am be-
seeching you, he himself beseeches the same
thing of you. Hear his own Words, *Mat.*
xi. 29. Learn of me, for I am meek and
lowly in Heart, and ye shall find rest unto
your Souls. Moreover

2. This Virtue of which our blessed Lord
hath set us so perfect an Example, and in
which he calls us to imitate him, is in itself
of infinite Advantage to us.

Meekness is the Strength and Stability of
the mind: It keeps the Soul serene, the
Judgment free, the Understanding in the
Throne: It puts a Curb on the boisterous
Passions, teaches them to obey the Check

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of Reason, and keeps a man in the full Possession of himself under those ruffling Events and Provocations which transport others into Wrath and Uproar.

Meekness gives a Man just the same Advantage over a passionate person in Debate, as a sober Man hath over one intoxicated with Liquor in a Battle. It keeps the mind in a proper Posture to meet all Events; and gives it a Magnanimity and Steadiness, a Firmness and Fortitude, superior to any which one that is conscious of it's Subjection to headstrong passions can possess. In a word, it is the Ballast of the Soul, which prevents it's being driven by stormy Passions on those rocks and shelves of Temptation, where it would be in great Danger of a Wreck. It disposes a Man to the several Services of Life and Religion, and prepares him for the most difficult; makes him more capable of doing good, both to himself and others; so that he enjoys much more from the comforts of Life, and suffers much less from the Evils of it than others do. Who would not then desire and seek and pray for and earnestly endeavour after a Disposition so infinitely beneficial? A Virtue that is at
once

once of indispensable Obligation and unspeakable Advantage!

Lastly, Let us consider how much we adorn and recommend Religion hereby.*

This is the very Spirit of Christianity, the Grace which either in one View or another is urged and pressed upon us more than any one beside. And scarce any thing dishonours Religion more than the Prevalence of the opposite Spirit in those who make a strict profession of Piety. A passionate, implacable, unforgiving, and revengeful Follower of the meek and humble *Jesus*, has an ill sound. No, no, we may think what we will, but *Jesus Christ* hath no such Disciples. And in vain do they who are under the allowed and prevailing Power, of so unchristian a Temper, assume to themselves the honour of that Relation. But if we discover our Relation to him by this similarity of Temper, and shew the Efficacy which his Word and Grace and Spirit have upon our minds, in forming them to this meek and gentle Disposition; if of peevish, perverse, and passionate, we become visibly more meek and mild and humble, we then shew that there is something real
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in

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in Religion ; that it is not an empty name, a vain pretence, or a bare profession. We honour Christ and his Gospel in the Eye of the World; and at the same time have the best Evidence and ground of Hope, that he will honour and acknowledge us *before his Father, and before his holy Angels*; and if we glorify him in this World we shall be glorified with him in the other. *Blessed are the Meek then above all Men, for they shall inherit the Earth, and theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

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ERRATA.

PAGE 21. l. 13. dele *and*. p. 37. l. 20, 21. read *for-*
ward. p. 56. l. 3. r. *raises*. p. 72. l. 24. d. *and*. p.
 89. l. 14. after *with* r. *the*. p. 120. l. 4. r. *laying*. p. 121.
 l. 16. after *and* r. *it is*. p. 148. l. 3. after *much* add *more*.
 p. 177. l. 19. for *dies* r. *died*. p. 186. l. 12. r. *it is*. p. 236.
 l. 11. for *in* r. *an*. p. 252. l. 5. r. *obstinacy*. p. 268. l. 3. r.
 of *it*. p. 282. l. 11. r. *clean*. p. 287. l. 5. r. *inattention*.
 p. 324. l. 1. r. *the best nature*. p. 333. l. 14. r. *of an angry*.

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